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MARGUERITE EYSEN

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Go-Devil



BESIDE RAND ON THE BANK OF THE BROOK, TIGE, HIS dun-colored, lop-eared hound-dog, lay stretched full length, dozing in the hot August sun dropping now behind the timber-crowned foothills of the Alleghenies that rolled away to the horizon in a blue haze. Now and again Tige roused to snap at a persistent fly or to dig with a hind paw for a pestering flea. Scratching, Tige caressed Rand drowsily with his eyes and then, yawning, relaxed and, stretching full length again, dropped back into his doze with a contented sigh.

Ma said the valley and all that went with it were right there in Tige. In Tige's veins ran the blood of all the valley dogs. Tige lived to eat, to sleep, and to hunt. Summers, he lay drowsing on the doorstep in the warm sun. Winters, he lay stretched before the fireplace, roasting but too lazy to move until the food churned in his stomach and he spewed it forth on the hearth. Only when Pa took his rifle from the corner did Tige come to life to trail a buck, tree a coon, flush rabbits and game birds.

"Look at the dog," Ma lashed out at Pa, "and see yourself!"

Rand was eleven that summer. The sun was hot upon his bare back as he knelt beside the brook that dawdled downhill to join Oil Creek meandering through the valley. His hair, bleached in a summer's sun, was a tow-colored thatch. His patched and faded jeans, oil-spattered, were rolled above his knees, precariously pendant from his hipbones by virtue of the harness strap that was his belt. His ribs, protruding above the hollow of his stomach, formed ladders to wide shoulders that gave his body the shape of an inverted triangle. His bare feet, soles

up as he knelt, had toughened and spread through the summer.

The brook, all but dry from the long drought, barely murmured as it slipped from rock to rock, trickling in a thin stream over the dam of mud and stone Rand had thrown across it, to form a shallow pool backed up by a lower dam. From the brook bed between the dams oil oozed up to form a greenish-brown scum on the pool, iridescent in the sunlight. Over the scum Rand spread the flannel rag and sat back on his heels, brushing the forelock and beads of sweat from his forehead while the rag slowly absorbed the scum of oil. His hands were red beneath the tan and oil; his stomach churned from the stench of oil warm in the sun. It was a lulling sound: the trickle of the brook mingled with the drone of insects, the buzzing of bees in the tangle of buckwheat and brambles behind him. Rand yawned.

But in his mind's eye he saw the clusters of boots hanging from pegs in the company store at Cherry Tree, smelled the new leather; big boots in which his feet would spread roomily, so long that their copper toes would curl up. The rock oil brought seventy-five cents a gallon. Doggedly Rand gathered in the saturated rag, wringing it over the bucket beside him on the bank until the greenish drip, oozing between his raw fingers, trickled down the side of the bucket. Spread, gather, wring. It was endless, and half of what was in the bucket would be water.

Suddenly Tige's head came up. Alert, he lay taut, his nostrils quivering, his eyes trained on the tangle of more buckwheat, more brambles and ragweed, goldenrod and wild asters, on the other side of the brook. It was a long minute before Rand heard the terrified, helpless sobbing. His eyes trained in the direction of the sound, he saw the shining head of a small girl above the tangle. Her hair, gold in the sun, was caught back from her forehead by a ribbon as blue as the sky. Behind the ribbon it fell shimmering to her shoulders. On the card he had for perfect attendance at Sunday school in the Seceders' Church was the picture of an angel. Blinking, Rand looked again to see no spread of white wings, no halo but the shining hair.

Slowly the head floated nearer, the sound of sobbing was

clearer, but Rand settled back on his heels and his face closed. Then, mingled with the sobbing, he heard what brought Tige stealthily to his feet: the dry, rasping rattle. Somewhere in the tangle a coiled rattler gave warning. Rand's hands froze on the oily rag. He opened his mouth, but it had gone bone-dry, and his tongue clove to the roof of it. Tige, though, needed no word from him. Gathering himself, Tige leaped across the brook, soundless.

Rand's hands gripped the rag; his eyes held the shining head. Again he heard the rattle as the swaying tangle marked Tige's soundless circling path. Tige's body shot suddenly up to form an arc above the tangle and dropped. High into the air flew the snake's writhing body to drop on the bank beside Rand with a soft rustling thud, still writhing, its fangs still darting, but with its flat triangular head at a sharp angle with its body. It was diamond-backed, and a dandy! Sometimes, though, with that quick jerk of his head, the rattler caught between his teeth, Tige snapped a snake's head clean off. With a stick Rand flipped the writhing snake into the brook bed below his pool, watched the sluggish water tug at it until it washed over the edge of a rock.

Tige lay beside him again, panting in the heat, his tongue dripping. The wild growth parted across the brook, and the girl stood there regarding him with eyes blue as her ribbons through the tears. Her dress, filmy and white as the clouds that flecked the sky, was bramble-torn. Burs and stick-tights clung to it. Its skirt, stopping just short of her ankles, stood out over the starched petticoats above the tiny strap slippers. Rand's eyes traveled covertly up to the bedraggled blue sash, the brief puffed sleeves. By one of its blue ties she still clung to the white bonnet. Rand's eyes dropped to the rag in his hand.

Slowly the great tears dried on her cheeks; the sobbing dwindled to a catch of breath as, wide-eyed, she watched him spread the flannel rag over the oily scum. Only the rush of blood to his face, rich red under the deep tan, betrayed his knowledge of her presence as he sat back on his heels, waiting. She wrinkled the pretty nose in disgust at the stench of oil, staring with frightened eyes at Rand's still face streaked with oil

and sweat, at the oil-soaked jeans, his bare callused feet. Not so much as a quiver of a facial muscle acknowledged her presence as he spread the rag over the oily scum, and slowly the fright in her eyes gave way to outrage. She stamped a foot.

"Dirty boy!" Her nose wrinkled again, and Rand gathered the rag in, wringing it. She swung her bonnet by its tie in a wide circle.

"I ran away. Papa was talking to a man, and I ran away!"

Rand spread the rag, sat back, and looked off across the buckwheat.

"What's your name?" Her lower lip, protruding, threatened more tears.

"Rand Bole."

"What you doing?"

"Soppin' oil."

"What for?"

"To sell to Simon, the Jew peddler. He bottles it and sells it to sick folks."

He had her attention away from herself. The bonnet stopped swinging; her eyes clung to his.

"What does he peddle?" she said, and Rand said slyly, "Ribbons."

"Pouf!" Her face fell, the tiny nose turned up. "I've got ribbons. I've got forty-'leven thousand ribbons." There was an aching wistful note in her voice when she said, "Rings and things are what I need."

Rand spread the rag again. She pirouetted on her toes with a rustle of petticoats, but he didn't look up.

"I know your name, but you don't know mine," she teased.

"Your name is Dwyer," Rand said. "Your father is Matt Dwyer. Your mother is dead, and Abby Sloan is your housekeeper. Your pony's name is Dapple."

He had seen her one Sunday morning as he drove to meeting in the lumber wagon with Ma behind Bess and Mac, the bay team. They reached the big white house with its wide lawns and spreading verandas, its gravel drive winding from two stone pillars to the stable behind, when Matt Dwyer turned out of

the drive onto the Creek road on his fine sorrel mare, and this girl was with him on her fat dappled pony. She rode sidesaddle. She wore a long blue skirt and a tight little jacket. She wore kid gloves, and she held a riding crop in one hand. Rand had caught a glimpse of one small boot in the stirrup. He still remembered its soft burnished leather. He remembered the laughing blue eyes, the shining hair, breeze-tossed.

They drew to the side of the road for the wagon to pass, and Matt Dwyer touched his hat with his crop as his fine horse danced.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," Ma said, but as if she begrudged the breath it took.

It was while Mac and Bess plodded on, hoof-deep in the dust of the Creek road, and the hoofbeats of the cantering mare and pony died in the distance that the hot words rolled from Ma's mouth in a molten flood as if they boiled up from within her. She said there wasn't a man in the valley who could see beyond his nose or he wouldn't be there working for Matt Dwyer. She said Matt Dwyer would skin a louse for its hide. Fifteen years, she said, Pa had worked for the Dwyer Lumber Company, spring and fall, rafting and logging, teaming in winter, too, while the snow lasted, and for a dollar a day. Twenty-one dollars cash money Pa had drawn all that time, and three hundred dollars he was in debt that very day at the company store.

"And when the timber's gone," Ma said, "Matt Dwyer will shake the dust of the valley from his feet and leave us here to starve!"

And Abby Sloan's hand itched to smack this girl who now stood there across the brook from Rand. She would, Abby said, be the better for the sting of the switch around her legs, yet Abby didn't dare so much as raise her voice to the minx, being a widow woman with Danny, her son; neither Abby nor the hoity-toity governess from New York.

"And the little devil'll suck them peppermints o' hers right

under my Danny's nose," Abby said, "and nary a taste would she give him."

"She comes by it naturally enough," Ma said, tight-lipped.

Rand's hand stung from the burn of the oil as he wrung the rag over the pail under the girl's puzzled eyes. Tige had relaxed again. He twitched in his sleep until once more his head came up, and he lay taut, listening.

"Pleasance!" A man's hoarse voice rang out across the valley, echoing back from the hills, and there was anguish in it. "Petty! Petty!"

"Papa!" Petty's treble shrilled above Tige's bark. "Papa, here I am!"

Matt Dwyer stumbled through the tangle. He dropped to his knees, caught Petty to him. His chest heaved; great drops of sweat streaked his face. His hands ran over her in frenzy. He caught her close, buried his face in the sunny hair.

"Christ!" he breathed. "Christ!"

He was a long, lean man. He had a long narrow head. His eyes, close-set, looked out from under his eyebrows like a hawk's. They devoured Petty as her arms locked around his neck.

"His name is Simon, Papa," she chattered, "and he's a Jew peddler, and can I have a ring? One with a blue set in it like Aunt Ettie's? And a necklace, Papa, to match? Please, Papa?"

She rained kisses along his cheek, but Matt Dwyer's eyes had dropped to the oily scum on Rand's pool as he stood there with Petty in his arms. He looked at the bucket. He looked down the slope to the stark weather-beaten frame house and ramshackle outbuildings in the clearing at the top of the lane that led up from the Creek road. He looked beyond the clearing to Oil Creek meandering through the valley, to the stagnant pools among the rocks, their oily surfaces glistening in the sun. His eyes came back to Rand, went from him along the brook.

"This stream on your place? Your name is Bole, isn't it?" Matt Dwyer's voice was affable and casual, but a low growl came from Tige. The hair on Tige's back stood up in a ridge. He bared his teeth.

"Yes," Rand said. "Down, Tige!"

Matt Dwyer's eyes came to a sharp focus on Rand and Tige.

"Yes what?" he said, and the blood crept red into Rand's face, ebbing slowly.

"Yes . . . sir," he said, just as along the valley came the faint sound of tinkling bells; the bells on Simon's horses! It was Saturday and Simon was coming. Simon would stay the night and tomorrow. Giving the flannel rag a last twist over the bucket, Rand caught the bucket up. Tige stopped once as they ran, the hair on his back ruffling again, and Rand looked back. Matt Dwyer still stood beside the brook, looking down, with Petty in his arms, her hair a golden halo in the sun, the blue of her ribbons like a piece of the sky.

"C'mon, Tige!" Rand turned slowly. "Simon's coming."

2

IT WAS A ONE-ROOM HOUSE, LOG-CABIN STYLE. ITS frame was of hewn pine timbers. Over the timbers rough boards had been nailed, and three-inch battens covered the cracks. There were a door and two windows in either side. At one end was a lean-to, the roof of which served as entrance to the attic, where farm implements were stored in winter, along with butternuts, walnuts, hickory nuts and chestnuts; Sarah Bole's herbs, too, with always a goodly supply of boneset with which she brewed the tea for Rand's relentlessly periodic internal cleansing.

At the end of the room was the stone fireplace, which served for heat and light and cooking. On the mantel was the grandmother's clock, its tick mingling with the bubble in the iron pot hanging from the crane. On one side of the clock was a neat stack of the weekly Venango County *Couriers*, the worn works of William Shakespeare. On the other side were *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, by Voltaire, Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* and his *Age of Reason*. The last, Sarah Bole refused to touch, even to dust. Beside it stood the ink bottle with the quill pen alongside.

In the center of the room were the deal table and the rough-hewn benches. Above the gleaming pots and skillets, pendant from spikes in the walls, were festoons of dried apples, red peppers, pumpkin. On the stone hearth browned the fat loaves of Sarah's bread, and in the iron pot simmered the slab of side meat. To one side of the hearth was a flat pan of sour cream, the curd separating in the warmth from the whey for the Dutch cheese.

Sarah Bole knelt to turn the loaves on the hearth and stood up, her eyes traveling around the room. She was thirty-six that summer, a spare, angular woman with iron-gray hair parted in the center and drawn rigorously back over her ears to the knot at her neck. Her gray calico dress, patched at the elbows and under the arms, was stiff with starch. Her hands were work-knotted; her shoulders had begun to droop. Around her mouth the bitter lines of frustration had cut deep, but in her eyes still burned the fire of obsession.

She had been a red-cheeked girl of nineteen, her snapping black eyes alight with adventure, when, the daughter of a small grocer, she came to the valley from Philadelphia to teach at the Blood schoolhouse up the Creek. By train to Erie, by stage from Erie to Titusville. At Titusville, Hiram Blood had met her with the team and wagon, a strapping rawboned man in overalls and sheepskin jacket. He had hoisted her small hair trunk to his shoulder with an easy swing, wordless. His expression was reserved and dour as she sat beside him high on the wagon seat, and it wasn't until they turned into the Creek road that he said dubiously, "It ain't any job for a woman, but there ain't any man that'll stay."

Breakable, slender, young, with her heart thudding beneath her stays, she had ridden beside him into the valley, and there was no turning back. Her father had married again after her mother's death, and her stepmother had brooked the expenditure for her schooling at the young ladies' seminary only because the young men of the neighborhood fought shy of Sarah's quick tongue, and the schooling was the one way to be rid of her. She was to board with the Bloods.

At dusk that night, with young Cissy Blood, she climbed the ladder to the trap door opening into the attic of the Blood cabin. The spool bed, with its rope cording, the cornhusk mattress, flannel sheet, and patchwork quilts, was an island in a sea of racks of drying apples, corn, and herbs. Shivering in the cold wind already rushing down from the hills with sundown to seep through the cracks in the walls, she had undressed with Cissy and slipped into the muslin nightgown with the crocheted

edging around the throat and wrists. Cissy slept in her petticoat. And there, huddled beneath the quilts, with Cissy's warm young body curled against her, Sarah had lain, shaking and sleepless, listening to the song of the whippoorwills, the hooting of owls, the scream of wildcats, the bark of foxes.

It was a mile along the snow-drifted Creek road to the schoolhouse in the gray light of early morning. Her fingers stiff with cold, Sarah had the fire to lay in the potbellied stove. By noon the air of the schoolhouse was warm and fetid, what with the youngones sewed into their flannels for the winter and the asafetida bags hanging around their necks to ward off disease. Their eyes grew heavy, their brains logy, their voices droned. And at best there was no lust for book-learning in them. Skilled in the lore of the woods, crack shots with a rifle, hunters and trappers, their eyes turned from the printed page to the windows, and in them was the look of wild things, caged. Set free at last, they vanished into the white trackless snow with wild shouts of release.

Only Cissy lingered while Sarah doused the fire and locked up. But for Cissy's thin little hand in hers, Sarah would have lost the Creek road more than once and struggled aimlessly against the thick curtain of falling snow. But for Cissy's sure hand, she'd have gone down in a dead faint that first time she felt eyes at her back and turned to see through the snow the dim outline of a stalking wolf. A scream swelled her throat, her knees wavered under her, but Cissy's hand tightened surely in hers.

"Don't run," Cissy said. "You might fall, and if you fall he'll pounce."

And yet that autumn she had seen John Bole at the Prestons' barn-raising, a handsome figure of a man with the easy rolling gait of the woodsman, a fine flow of words, a courtly grace in the square dance. The barn had gone up, the fiddlers had taken their places at one end of the dirt floor, and as the fiddles sang out the lilting strains of "Opera Roll," "Money Musk," and "French Four," John's arm had sought Sarah's slim waist, and the blood stung hot in her cheeks.

It was John who sought the chair next to her at the apple parings. They sat side by side while John pared and quartered the apples and Sarah strung the quarters with needle and string to hang, drying, in festoons. Together they caught the mingled scents of apples and spices as apple butter simmered in the copper kettle hanging from the pole over the wood fire, and of the rock oil brought down by the mountain streams to swirl in redolent streaks in the water of Oil Creek. On the long bob-sled rides, John huddled warmly close to Sarah in the straw, and his hand sought hers.

Along the valley spread the word that "Teacher" was sitting up with John Bole, and the valley's verdict was that Teacher was taking her pigs to a poor market. Jennie Blood passed the verdict along to Sarah one night when she and Sarah washed the supper dishes in the kitchen lean-to with the Blood brood still gorging thick slices of bread and sorghum at the table, their faces smeared and their hands sticky. Young'uns, Jennie said, were about the only crop in the valley that grew without more coaxing than the crop was worth. "Young'uns and buckwheat," Jennie said. She was the oldest of the Blood brood of eight, the family drudge at sixteen, a thin sallow girl with mousy hair, beau-less.

"Seems like it was always easier for the Bole men to set on their behinds by the fire," Jennie hinted, "and read in a book 'bout places that was already cleared than 'twas to clear their own."

But so strong was the singing surge of wild sweet blood in her veins at John Bole's touch that Sarah knew only pity for Jennie's envy. Jennie would be lucky to find herself the choice of a valley widower someday in search of a mother for his numerous brood. Sarah only smiled to herself when Jennie sniffed, "I guess John Bole's tired o' cookin' his own vittles. Some say his mother's touched, and some say she ain't. All I know is she set herself down in her rocker one day and begun to rock, and they do say she ain't turned a hand since."

Jennie talked against the wind. That spring when the quaking asp was feathery white against the dark green of hemlock in

the hills, the misty new green of the maples; when Oil Creek, high and swirling with the swollen streams tumbling down from the hills, bore its burden of logs downstream and the shouts of the rafters echoed through the valley, Sarah and John were married by the Reverend Ezekiel Cotton of the Seceders' Church up the Creek. The reverend had finished with the ceremony before his wife and daughter, summoned from wash-tubs behind the cabin as witnesses, were done with drying their hands on their aprons. Afterward John had drawn the reverend aside. Sarah didn't know then that the preacher agreed to take a bushel of potatoes as his fee.

John swung her up to the wagon seat beside him, and they drove down the Creek road to turn up the lane that led to the Bole place. Sarah was light as a feather in John's strong arms, laughing and joyous, as he lifted her across the cabin threshold. He set her down, and standing there with the blushes in her cheeks, she saw a toothless crone, bent and twisted with rheumatism, ceaselessly rocking in the hickory chair by the fireplace, peering at her with bright sunken eyes in which there was an eerie, addled light. Lizzie Bole's knotted, bony fingers dug into the soft flesh of Sarah's arms, feeling the muscle. They rubbed the material of Sarah's dark red merino dress between them. Lizzie's verdict was a high, wild cackle. She cackled until the tears rolled down the wrinkled parchment of her face, and then she ran the twisted fingers aimlessly through the thin flying wisps of grubby white hair.

"You've lost your bed, Ma!" John shouted to penetrate the muddled mind.

"I've lost my bed." Lizzie mumbled it over and over until the cackle died and only tears were left. "And 'tis only pity I have for the woman that takes it."

So Lizzie slept that night on John's pallet by the fire. Sarah and John slept in Lizzie's bed in the lean-to. Its flannel sheet was ragged and redolent of the sour brownish smell of Lizzie. The patchwork quilt was crusty against Sarah's cheek, but she lay warm and drowsily fulfilled in John's arms, his fine impassioned words hugged to her heart; her eyelids drooped, and,

her head on John's shoulder, she dropped asleep to dream.

The next morning, with the sweet joy of fulfillment still upon her, the dreams still in her eyes, she rolled up her sleeves. First came the fireplace. Jeb Bole, John's father, had spat carelessly from his chair on the other side of the fireplace from Lizzie, and long after his death the tobacco spittle still clung caked and dried to the field stone. Sarah scrubbed the stone with lye, scalding water, but the stain had soaked deep, and in the end she whitewashed it while Lizzie rocked and watched, bright malice in her eyes.

Now and again Lizzie had a lucid spell. It was during one of them that she shook her palsied head from side to side as she said to Sarah, "It ain't any use. A body can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, girl!" And when Sarah scrubbed relentlessly on she said, "A Bole'll eat and sleep and hunt. He'll bed down with a woman and set with his book, but the Bole never lived that had any git to 'im."

The chickens and flies and bats, the wasps and bees and great moth millers had had the run of the house. Confidently Sarah added the two screen doors to John's bill at the company store, the red netting to tack over the windows. She scrubbed the deal table, the benches, the floors. She scoured the skillet with sand, the copper kettles and pots until they caught the sun on their hooks. She scoured the bed, washed the stained ticking, filled it with clean husks. The bedclothes whipped in the wind on a line in the sun.

And then she and John came to grips over Lizzie. Sarah had heated a kettle of water, and it hung steaming from the crane. She fetched the washtub from its spike on the rear outside wall of the house and set it before the fire. She laid the big bar of lye soap and the brush on the floor beside the tub and advanced upon Lizzie. Lizzie fought and scratched like a wildcat, screeching. She slipped Sarah's grasp to scuttle to John, clawing at him.

"Let her alone." John's eyes blazed up at Sarah as he shoved his mother back to her chair.

"She's got to have a bath, John." Sarah stood her ground.

"To hell with a bath!" The blood ran dark in John's face.

"God A'mighty, woman, is there nothing in your head but soap?"

"She—she smells." Sarah's dark eyes snapped.

"Let her alone, I tell you!"

"John, I—I can't eat." Sarah's first child was already quick within her, but John picked up his gun, sick of the yammering, and from the doorway he said, "You'll eat, I guess, when you're hungry enough."

But there was iron in Sarah under the soft exterior as only the quick tongue had hinted to warier men. The next time John slung a bag of grain across the back of one of the farm horses and rode down the lane to turn up the Creek road toward Irwin's mill at Cherry Tree, Sarah had it out with Lizzie, cowering her with threat of the stick in her hand. She cut Lizzie's tattered gray wrapper from her, the layers of flannel underneath. She scrubbed Lizzie, and Lizzie sobbed helplessly. Lizzie's hair came out snow-white, and her scalp showed pink through the thin wisps under the white lawn cap Sarah had fashioned from one of her handkerchiefs. But never again did Sarah take the washtub down without turning to find Lizzie's chair empty; and, searching the barn, the smokehouse, or corncrib, stick in hand, she saw Lizzie's bright eyes peering at her from a dim corner.

And Lizzie had her revenge the night Sarah bore her first child on the bed in the lean-to, her teeth clenched against the agonized screams that welled in her throat while Lizzie rocked the night through in her chair, cackling, while the water steamed in the iron pot on the crane, and wizened Sadie Peters, the valley midwife, knit placidly, her snuffbox handy in her lap. With dawn the boy was born dead. Sadie could neither spank nor blow life into him, and Sarah lay weakly sobbing.

Her second child, a girl, was stillborn, and Sarah was tearless. By that time she knew the bitter struggle for subsistence in the valley and she knew John Bole. John could take his rifle from the corner, whistle for his coon hound, and in three strides he could be beyond the lash of her tongue. He could settle into his chair by the fire, open his book, and Sarah's hot, searing

words beat against heedless ears. She learned to stumble behind the plow in the wake of the team, the reins around her neck.

And yet the fire of obsession had lit in her eyes when Sadie laid Rand in the crook of her arm and said, "This'n'll live, looks like." Her arm tightened around the helpless bundle and, spent, she dropped into the sleep of exhaustion only to dream that she was struggling against a thick curtain of snow with her baby in her arms toward some valley gateway. She felt eyes at her back and, turning, she saw the wolf's dim outline.

"Don't fall," Cissy Blood was calling to her. "If you fall he'll pounce."

And it was on that same bed that Sarah laid Lizzie Bole out, folding the twisted hands on Lizzie's shriveled breast while the neighbors' pounding hammers rang out as they fashioned the pine coffin. With Rand clinging to her skirts, she stood looking down at Lizzie, dressed in the dark red merino dress Sarah had worn as a bride, sponged and pressed and turned for the last time. There was only understanding in her heart for Lizzie; too deep, too bitter for tears. Back from the churchyard, she stood in the doorway, and her eyes went to Lizzie's chair, empty and waiting.

"No!" The scream broke through her hands clenched against her mouth. "No!"

"Peace, woman! What's got into you?" John dropped into his chair, and, on her knees, Sarah caught Rand to her to bury her face in the curve of his neck.

Rand was eleven now. While the bread browned on the hearth Sarah stood in the stifling heat of the room at one of the front windows that looked out across Oil Creek to the timber-crowned ridge beyond. Her eyes came back to the Creek, all but dry from the summer's drought, to its stagnant pools with their oily, shimmering scum. There were gateways that led out of the valley. Down the Creek where it joined the Allegheny was Cornplanter with its dozen houses, a boat landing, an iron furnace, the Red Lion Inn, the gristmill; but a steamboat went down the river from there to Pittsburgh. Up the Creek was Titusville with its hundred souls, dependent for their subsist-

ence upon the couple of lumber companies. From Titusville it was only forty miles by stage to Erie and the railroad, but struggle toward the gateway as she would, in the seventeen years in the valley Sarah had known only the slow sinking into the morass of debt.

Drops of sweat stood out on her forehead and upper lip as she stood there at the open window, her hands clenched, pressed against her mouth. Behind her, beside the fire, was Lizzie Bole's hickory rocker.

"No!" The scream beat against Sarah's hands. "*No!*"

Back from the ridge came the echo of it, mocking her, mingling with the faint sound of bells coming down the valley. She heard Tige's bark and turned to see Tige and Rand running toward the house, the bucket between them. And over the hill swung John, his gun over his shoulder, in his hand a brace of bright-hued pheasants. They stood at the top of the lane, the three of them, while the sound of bells grew louder. Simon's team of geldings, fat and sleek, pranced up the lane to the tune of the bells in the arches on their collars. To the side of the covered wagon clung bright clusters of new tin pans glinting in the sunlight. Drawing up, Simon wrapped the reins around the whip and clambered down.

He was a little man in a black frock coat and trousers long since green along the seams. His high stock collar was sizes too big, and it seemed as if only the black side whiskers kept his head from slipping through it. His long aquiline nose was hooked as an eagle's beak; his black hard hat, gray with dust, rode his ears. The eyes peering out from under the bushy black eyebrows were both sharp and kindly, betraying the eternal war between Simon's talents and his heart. They lit up at the sight of Rand. Simon took one of Rand's shoulders in either hand.

"How he grows, eh?" Simon chuckled. "A fine boy, eh?" He stood back, his head to one side as his eyes traveled over Rand. He tapped Rand's forehead with a grimy forefinger. "Here he is the father, no?" He laid a hand over Rand's heart. "But here he is the mother, eh? Yes, yes! A fine big boy—I tell you the truth!"

3

THERE WAS NO BEDDING AT DUSK THAT NIGHT; THEY had light. From his stock Simon brought a coal-oil lamp that burned bright on the table. It had a gleaming brass standard, a fat china bowl over which rosebuds strayed. Its shade, another fat bowl to match the base, was laid aside that Simon might have more light for his task as he filled his bottles with the rock oil from Rand's bucket. Over the dying embers in the fireplace hung the kettle of water for Rand's bath, but the doors and windows were open, and down from the hills swept the cooling breeze. On the table beside the lamp was Ma's wooden mixing bowl filled with the reddest, juiciest apples, the pitcher of cider from the best barrel.

And the Maguires had come from across the Creek. They'd heard Simon's bells and, with Willie, their oldest, had hopped the greasy pools to hear from Simon the news of the valley. Patrick Maguire was one of the valley fiddlers, and he brought his fiddle with him. A round little man with a flaring fringe encircling his bald spot, he fiddled dreamily while Pa talked, letting Pa's fine words roll over him.

Willie was fourteen, a great lout of a boy with soft rolls of fat above his jeans, a pink round face, little mischievous eyes. He lay on his fat stomach before the fire between Pa and Patrick, munching an apple while the politics and Irish tunes swept over his head, and his eyes, catching Rand's, rolled slyly toward his mother's swollen body.

May Maguire was a big, flabby woman with limpid, plaintive eyes, heavy again with child. Her huge swollen breasts, hanging pendant, bulged under her wrapper. Under her arms the

wrapper was dark to her waist with sweat rings, and her breath came shallowly as she sat at the table with Ma and Simon and Rand, wistfully fingering the bolt of black silk, the dress lengths of bright calico, the swatches of Brussels carpet, and the sample pair of lace curtains, which, out of the goodness of his heart, Simon had brought in from his wagon that the women might look. There was no money here.

Lifting the tin funnel from a bottle, Simon passed the bottle along to Rand. Rand corked the bottle and, licking a label, pasted it to the side of the bottle. Simon's labels were bright and persuasive, copied piecemeal from his various competitors. On them was the picture of an Indian because the Indians, the label said, had the native wisdom to discover the curative power of the oil. The Indian's name was Lo, and the labels listed the many ills to which poor Lo had been heir: cholera morbus, fever, ague, croup, toothache, corns, neuralgia, rheumatism, piles, urinary disorders, indigestion, liver complaint, and blindness. Below the list of ills was a poem which said:

*This healthful balm from Nature's secret spring
The bloom of health and life to man will bring.
As from her depths the magic liquid flows,
To calm our sufferings and assuage our woes.*

And May Maguire kept picking at Simon for the valley gossip while Ma's face grew more set and bitter with the glimpse of the world beyond the valley. Licking a label, Rand counted the bottles. If there were enough of them maybe Ma would say, "The boy has outgrown his boots." Yes, he had got foot in the Dwyer house, Simon told May, but only in the kitchen. No, he hadn't seen anybody but Abby Sloan. Abby said Matt Dwyer's brother's widow had come on a visit from Bradford, her whose husband had been in lumber, too, and only the good Lord who had visited the affliction upon Abby knew for how long. Was his brother's widow setting her cap for Matt Dwyer? Abby hadn't said, but the governess didn't eat at the table while Aunt Ettie was there. She ate her meals on a tray in her

room. And Danny was gone from the Dwyer house. Abby had had to send him to her sister in Meadville because when Petty Dwyer slapped him Danny had pulled her hair.

"And the yellow-headed little slut," Abby told Simon, "went squalling to her father."

"Fourteen . . . fifteen," Rand counted to himself. Out loud he said, "Petty is pretty."

"Pretty!" Simon chortled. "You better not let Abby Sloan hear you, boy!"

"She's pretty!" Rand licked another label. "Pretty like the angels."

"Angels, eh?" Twinkling, Simon looked at Ma. "He has the mind of his own, hein? And he sees young, no?"

"Pretty is as pretty does!" Ma settled it, tight-lipped.

From the Dwyer house May and Simon traveled up the Creek, house by house, nearing Titusville.

"The man, Drake," Simon said, "he still bores for oil."

Patrick Maguire's bow stopped halfway across the fiddle strings as he burst into a roar of laughter, and even the corners of Ma's mouth twitched. Only Pa's eyebrows drew together in annoyance at the interruption. Snickering, Willie rolled over on his back, pillowed his head on Tige, and bit into another apple. May Maguire held a fold of the black silk up against her.

"Crazy as a loon, Drake is," Patrick chuckled.

Boring in rock for oil, mind you. And still at it since May. All in a lather because some college professor had said the rock oil could be used to oil machinery and even refined to take the place of coal oil, some Eastern tenderfeet with more money than brains had got the notion of boring into the rock for oil. They had formed a company, and the Brewer & Watson Lumber Company up the Creek had unloaded onto them a slice of their denuded timberland for five thousand dollars and a block of the company stock. They'd sent the man, Drake, to take charge, and fine stock certificates were for sale around Titusville.

Drake cut a wide swath. He and his family and team put up at the American House in Titusville to the tune of six dollars and a half a week. Drake wore a frock coat, a plug hat, and

congress gaiters. His mail came to the post office addressed to Colonel Drake. He'd laid hold of Uncle Billy Smith, a genial old salt-well driller from down around Pittsburgh way and had set him to boring. Drake had reached the end of his rope, though. His credit was stretched to the breaking point, and the bills were piling up on him.

"Last I heard," Patrick said, "the salt water was comin' in on Uncle Billy and the hole'd caved in."

"He drove a length of drive pipe to bedrock." Pa had heard it at the company store. "He's boring through the pipe."

Shaking his head, Patrick nestled his fiddle beneath his chin again and drew his bow gently across the strings with a sly wink for Pa and Simon as he said, "Course, Brewer and Watson ain't lost so much by it."

"Myself, I dunno!" Simon shrugged, his hands palms up, and Patrick was off again into the lilting strains of "Crooked S." Clearing his throat, Pa went after President Buchanan again.

"Buchanan!" Pa snorted. "An old woman divided between his tears and his prayers."

Pa was a black Republican and Abolitionist. The men at the company store of a Saturday afternoon winked at each other behind Pa's back and allowed there was something to be said for Douglas and popular sovereignty. Sometimes they said John Brown was a crackpot, and when Pa got going they'd wink again; and, yawning, Dred Salisbury, who managed the store for Dwyer, would shift his cud to the other cheek, spit, and ask Pa, "Your woman ain't got her hay in yet, has she, Bole?" They made Pa so mad he stomped out of the store with Rand at his heels, and they lounged there on the store porch, grinning, when Pa turned on the wagon seat and shook his fist at them.

Ma would have no truck with politics. She said politics buttered no bread. She sat now with her eyes on May Maguire, still fingering the black silk.

"But I was always kind of partial to red," May said fussily.

Licking, Rand dreamed. Someday he would be a peddler like Simon. He would have a fine team of horses. Their names

would be Mac and Bess like Pa's team. He would drive down the valley with his bells tinkling and his horses prancing and with Tige on the wagon seat beside him. He would sell rings and things, with blue sets. When he came to Petty's house he would say to Petty, "Here is a ring with a blue set for you, and you don't need to pay me." When he came to Ma's house she would be waiting at the top of the lane. He would get down from the wagon seat with the bolt of silk under his arm and he would say to Ma, "Here is the whole bolt for you, Ma, and you don't need to pay me."

But coal oil wasn't to be had for the dreaming, and the rock oil was bottled and stored in the covered wagon. Simon blew out the light, and Patrick cradled his fiddle lovingly in its case. Willie was sound asleep with his head on Tige, and the water for Rand's bath sent up steam from the kettle. May shook Willie awake, and the Maguires were off down the lane. Simon crawled the ladder against the lean-to, across the roof and into the window of the attic where he slept with Rand. Ma brought the washtub from its spike on the back wall of the house, the lye soap and the brush. She poured the hot water into the tub, her mouth a tight line and the light burning high in her eyes.

Always the lamp, the carpet swatches, the lace curtains brought on one of Ma's spells, and Pa was abed in the lean-to within reach of her tongue. Doubled into the tub, his knees under his chin, Rand scrubbed at his knees, his toughened feet, while Ma alternately drilled him in the weekly Scripture lesson by the light of the dying fire and lashed out at Pa again about selling the place and moving lock, stock, and barrel to Philadelphia. Rand could recite the four Gospels by heart and some of the Acts. Ma went from there to the Scripture lesson and then to the questions of the catechism while she nagged at Pa.

"What is thy duty toward thy neighbor?" That was for Rand, and for Pa, "And the boy has outgrown his boots!"

"He ain't so Gospel-greedy he can't bide at home," Pa said.

"My duty toward my neighbor is to love him as myself," Rand droned, scrubbing, "and to do to all men——"

"And when the timber's gone," Ma lashed at Pa. "What then?"

"There's the land," Pa said.

"The land!" Ma did for Pa and the land in the two scathing words and came to, "What is the inward and spiritual grace?"

"A death unto sin"—Rand ran one word into the next—"and a new birth into righteousness, for being by nature born in sin——"

"God A'mighty, woman, who'd buy the land?" Pa roared, goaded, and the wrangling ended. Nobody would buy the land, and Ma knew it. Five years now Sam Preston down the Creek had been figuring on selling out for twelve hundred dollars and buying into his brother's blacksmith shop in Meadville.

"What are the benefits whereof we are partakers thereby?" The fire had gone out of Ma. Her shoulders slumped; the lines deepened around her mouth as she sat with the Holy Writ in her lap in the light of the dying fire, her eyes on the hickory rocker.

"The strengthening and refreshing of our souls." Rand reached for the towel.

In his nightshirt he climbed the ladder while Tige settled down at the foot of it for the night. From the lean-to roof Rand looked down into the valley. The moon was high and full, and the glistening pools among the rocks reflected its light. Twisting, with its scattered spots, the Creek looked like the diamond-backed rattler on the rock that afternoon.

Simon slept in his shirt and high collar and the black cravat. Beside him Rand lay listening to the scream of a wildcat. His body itched and burned from the lye soap. Simon would make his way now down the Creek to Cornplanter, down the Allegheny to Pittsburgh, where he would stock up again and start back. He wouldn't come again until spring. Rand nudged Simon, and Simon's guttural snore wavered.

"Simon," Rand said, "do you sell rings?"

"Rings?" Simon roused. "Ten cents." He dropped back to sleep again, adding automatically in his sleep, "Cheap at twice the price. I tell you the truth!"

4

BESS WHINNIED WHEN RAND OPENED THE BARN DOOR.

She and Mac were like two peas in a pod except for the white star on Bess's forehead, but Bess was the one that nuzzled him all over, looking for the carrot in the pocket of his jeans. She ducked her head for him, munching when he stood on the feedbox to slip the collar over her head. Even Ma had a good word for Bess and Mac. She said they ate more than they wrenched from the stony clearing or teaming for Matt Dwyer, but they were willing. They were Rand's chore and his pride. Hitching them to the wagon, he gave them a last Sunday swipe with the flannel rag, and their coats shone in the morning sun as he drove them to the house with Tige on the seat beside him.

"C'mon, Tige!" Rand knew envy as Tige leaped down. "Yup, you're going for rabbits with Pa."

The breakfast dishes were washed, the dishpan hung on its spike. Simon sat at the table, figuring in his little paper-backed book, his steel-rimmed spectacles clinging precariously to his hooked nose, and in front of him on the table was a neat pile of coins with here and there a crumpled bill. Ma had changed to her dress. It was black bombazine, worn and shiny, but there was a row of black jet buttons down the front of the tight basque, and around its high collar was a white ruching fashioned from one of the lace handkerchiefs she had brought from Philadelphia. Its full skirt swept the floor and hid her worn shoes. She said, "Hurry, Rand."

In the lean-to Rand drew on the long drawers. Next came the white shirt, the starched collar, the bow tie. His pants were too short. Ma had let them out, faced them, but they still

cleared the top of his boots. The round jacket caught him across the shoulders, under the arms; his hands and wrists dangled from the sleeves. He donned the felt hat carefully creased around the flat crown, and then the evil moment was upon him.

He jammed his right foot into the right boot, greased and rubbed, and sweat stood out on his upper lip. Lacing the boot, he stood tentatively down on it, and a drop of sweat slid down his back. "Come, Rand," Ma called, and he jammed his left foot into the other boot. His face turned a sickly greenish-white under the tan, but Ma was tying the black bonnet beneath her chin. She drew on the mended black cotton gloves, stood there with the Writ in her two hands, the pink high in her cheeks as Pa took his gun from the corner and Tige yelped and danced around him.

"Come, Rand," Ma said. There was an edge in it for Pa which said, "A fine example to your son!"

Straight as a ramrod, her chin high, she sat on the wagon seat beside Rand, her skirt spread around her, the Writ in her hands in her lap. Mac and Bess turned out of the lane onto the Creek road, plodding hoof-deep in dust. The morning sun beat down on their backs. There was the smell of sun and dust, horse sweat, leather, rock oil from the Creek. Rand's feet swelled with the heat in his shoes, and his stomach churned with the pain of it.

They came to the two great stone pillars from which the graveled drive wound to the Dwyer house, white and cool under shading maples, with wide-spreading verandas. Down the drive came Dapple drawing a two-wheeled basket cart. Petty was driving. Her blue bonnet had a wide brim that framed her face, the shining hair. Beside her sat a woman in a billow of crisp ruffles, her tiny ruffled parasol tilted toward the sun. They met, the wagon and the basket cart, at the stone pillars; and, panting, Dapple stopped to let the wagon pass. Ma looked straight ahead, and her chin went up a notch when through the cloud of dust in their wake they heard Petty's treble. Petty said, "—and a dog, Auntie, and a bucket and—"

"A pity for the pony," Ma said. "It's a hard lot for man or beast to belong to Matt Dwyer."

"He's Petty's pony." Rand felt no concern for Dapple, but Ma wasn't listening.

They came at last to the white steepled church in the clearing. Teams and wagons were hitched to the trees; the brethren and sisters were already assembled on the lawn exchanging the gossip of the valley, comparing crop yields, bemoaning the drought. Ma didn't mingle with them. From Ma there was only a quick nod and a bright smile when she said, "Good morning, Sister Preston. Good morning, Brother Lanz." Let them whisper through the valley that Pa owed three hundred dollars at the company store and that Matt Dwyer had put him on cash. The proud line of Ma's back belied it, and the tilt of her chin said, "Don't limp, Rand. Don't limp!"

The congregation assembled. There was the swish of crinoline along the floor, the faint smell of moth balls. Then came the rustle of pages of the hymnal, the clearing of throats as Elder Lanz took his place on the platform and got his pitch with his tuning fork. They rose to sing, and sweat crawled down Rand's back, but Ma's voice rang out full and sweet as she sang:

*"Why should I doubt Thy grace
Or yield to dread despair?
Thou wilt fulfill Thy promised word
And grant me all my prayer."*

Peace came to her with the words. Her eyes never left Elder Lanz all the while he expounded the Scripture lesson. He was a bony-faced, fiery-eyed man so full of inner grace that it rolled from him in a torrent of words. To the repentant he swung the gates of heaven ajar upon "golden gardens already cleared." To the unrepentant he promised fire and brimstone, eternal, white-hot, flesh-searing. Rand eased first one foot and then the other from the floor, his eyes on Elder Lanz in fascinated horror.

There was a fifteen-minute respite for lunch, but the strips of jerked bear meat, the cold saleratus biscuits stuck in Rand's throat. His visions of fire and brimstone faded before the burning of his feet, the agonizing cramping of his toes. And there was another hour and a half of it to come.

The Reverend Ezekiel Cotton wheezed up the steps to the pulpit, a big-bellied man whose body looked like a huge frock-coated egg on two black-trousered fence posts. He had ridden circuit until he grew too heavy for his horse and the Seceders had built the church, and then he had settled down with his wife and nine children on sixty acres along the Creek. He mopped his chins as he read his text from the Writ. Sweat streaked his face as he pounded the pulpit with his fist. It was about Caesar and God, treasures on earth and treasures in heaven, but the afternoon sun beat down upon the roof of the church, Rand's head swam, his eyes blurred. The white ring around his mouth widened, cold sweat stood out all over him, the saliva ran in his mouth, and the reverend's outline dimmed. And then horror assailed Rand. He clutched his hat to his mouth and was retchingly sick into it there in the pew with Ma and with the eyes of the valley upon him. The reverend stopped midway of a sentence as Ma rose and walked down the aisle with Rand in her wake, her head high. Necks craned, but Rand limped, stumbling.

He sat on the grass beside the wagon and tugged at a boot, but his feet were too swollen, and he was sick again. Ma got down on her knees and tugged while the blood rushed to her face with the effort, and her bonnet slipped to one side. The boot yielded; Rand spread his cramped toes, swallowing, while Ma tugged at the other boot. It wouldn't give, and at last Ma said, "Give me your knife, Rand." With the jackknife she slit the boot this way and that, long ruinous slits, but it gave, and Rand was lightheaded with the relief of it. In his bare feet he untied Mac and Bess, and on the wagon seat with Ma, his feet spread wide, he sat guilty and waiting as Ma, driving now, turned back into the Creek road.

The line of Ma's back was still straight. Her mouth was a tight straight line and her chin was still high, but the color had drained from her face. On the wagon seat between her and Rand was the Writ, but Rand's boots were on top of it with the socks stuffed into them. Out of the corner of his eye Rand watched her, waiting for her to boil over, to hear her say, "Have you no pride? You're a Bole born and bred!"

But Ma said none of it as Mac and Bess plodded on in the dust. Her eyes were fixed straight ahead at a point between Bess's ears. Her face went whiter, more set. The lines around her mouth deepened. She didn't hear the thud of hoofs galloping toward them. She didn't turn out or so much as look up when Matt Dwyer hurtled past them on his gray stallion, bent forward in the saddle, raking the horse's flank with his spurs. Ma seemed only to see something taking shape in the cloud of dust that swept over them, and her eyes never wavered.

The team's pace quickened as they turned into the lane toward the barn, but Ma pulled them up to a dead stop there in the lane. With the reins loose in her hands, she sat looking at the gray weather-beaten house, the ramshackle outbuildings. She looked at the sickly, drought-stunted corn, at the sparsely headed oats, the tumble of buckwheat and brambles. The next minute she dropped the reins to catch Rand to her, to bury her face against his shoulder while a shudder ran through her.

"Don't stop for me, Rand," she sobbed. "Run, Rand, for your life. Be good, son, and try—try to—to trust in God."

It was as if the earth had cracked open at Rand's feet. Never had he seen tear of Ma's. Never had he known her to be anything but proud, sharp-tongued, dominant. The icy hand of terror closed around his heart and, clinging to her, he begged, "Don't cry, Ma. . . . Ma, don't! Ma, I'll sop oil tomorrow. I'll sop oil every day, Ma. Ma, I'll buy you a lamp. I'll buy you a carpet and curtains and a silk dress." It brought her back. Drying her eyes, she picked up the reins, but something had gone out of her. Her shoulders slumped. Her eyes seemed to be deep, deep in her head, and there was a desperate kind of tiredness in them, as if she never expected to be rested.

She sat still and pale at the supper table while Pa told Simon that compromise was out of the question. It would be Lincoln, Pa said, and freedom for the blacks. The Rebels could swallow it or fight.

"‘A house divided against itself cannot stand!’" Pa said it with fine fire. He liked the sound of it on his tongue.

"Myself, I dunno." Simon shrugged, his hands palms up. Simon's mind was already ahead of him down the valley. He would travel as far as the Prestons' that night and be that much ahead on tomorrow's journey. Ma's eyes went from Pa to Tige, sprawled before the cold fireplace, spent from the day's hunting and full of the innards of the rabbits Pa had got, skinned and hanging in the springhouse; and from Tige, Ma's eyes went to the hickory rocker by the fireplace.

But the pink came back into her cheeks when, at the top of the lane, Simon laid the two half dollars in her hand; fifty cents for lodging man and team, fifty cents for the rock oil. The boots at the company store were a dollar and a quarter. Rand's heart sank—and then soared. He didn't have any boots at all now, so he couldn't go to meeting, and he could hunt with Pa and Tige. The pink in Ma's cheeks deepened as she stood looking down at the coins in her hand. Elsewhere Simon would have traded a shining tin pan or an iron kettle on his debt, and Ma knew it. Her lip was caught between her teeth as she handed him the cup of strained goose grease for Sam Preston's wife; her that had been Jennie Blood, whom Sam Preston had married six weeks after his first wife's death to mother his brood. Jennie had a baby of her own now, covered with sores the rock oil wouldn't heal.

"Tell Jennie I said to try it," Ma said to Simon. "It won't do any harm."

She stood there with Pa and Rand and Tige as Simon's wagon rumbled down the lane, and the jingling clusters of pans, the tinkling silver bells cut the brooding stillness of the valley. Simon turned into the Creek road, the tinkle of the bells faded into the distance, and, head down, Ma turned toward the house.

But Tige stopped scratching, stood suddenly rigid, listening. They heard it then, the dust-padded thud of galloping hoofs. The horse turned into the lane, still galloping. It was Matt Dwyer's stallion, lathered under the saddle. Foam flecked from his mouth, his neck was dark with sweat, and as Dwyer swung down from the saddle the stallion dropped his head and a thin stream of blood trickled from his nostrils.

"A word with you, Bole." Dwyer's voice was curt; his glance dismissed Ma and Rand.

"Come, Rand." Ma turned toward the house, but Tige held his ground. The hair stood up on Tige's back in a ridge; he bared his teeth, growling, until a swift lift of Pa's boot caught his hind end. His tail between his legs then, Tige slunk after Ma and Rand.

Ma sat with her hands twisting together on the table, waiting. Fear crept into her eyes; a pulse pounded in her temples. She wavered always between shame over their debt at the company store and the knowledge that it gave Matt Dwyer the whip hand over Pa, kept Pa at the logging and rafting and teaming that eked out their subsistence.

"He'll have work," she said over and over to Rand, "long as he owes Dwyer and the timber lasts."

But the pupils in her eyes were darkly distended by the time Pa came in; the pulse pounded; her breath came shallow and fast. Pa had a paper in his hand. He laid it on the table before her, and Ma's lips moved, mumbling as she read in the deepening dusk, "For the sum of fifteen hundred dollars cash, I promise to sell my two hundred acres on Oil Creek, together with my team of horses and wagon, to Matt Dwyer, said two hundred acres—"

Ma stopped and turned back to read it again. She looked up at Pa. She said, unbelieving, "It means—he'll buy—the place?"

"That's what it says, don't it?" Pa's eyes shifted away from hers. He spat into the dead ashes of the fireplace and then laid the ink and pen from the mantel beside the paper on the table. Slowly, as Ma sat looking down at the paper, the gates of

heaven swung ajar for her on the golden gardens already cleared, but her faith wavered. She said, "What—why would he want it?"

"He's cleaning up what he's got standing out at the store." Pa's eyes shifted again. "And he thinks maybe there's fifteen hundred or so in timber on the place."

Slowly Ma's faith took hold, and then her face was illumined. The years slipped from her. She looked young, even pretty. Pa's eyes turned crafty as he glanced through the open window to Matt Dwyer waiting beside his winded stallion. Pa kept his voice low when he said to Ma, "And I figure I can buy Sam Preston's place for round a thousand, and Sam's got it pretty well cleared."

"No!" The word came from Ma's mouth like the shot from a gun, and outside Dwyer looked up, but Ma wouldn't set pen to paper unless Pa laid his right hand on the Writ and promised her they would move to Philadelphia. She had it all planned. They would buy a small neighborhood grocery. She said, "And the boy will have his chance." Pa would have none of it. He said the valley had been good enough for him and his father before him; it was good enough for his son.

Then Ma fought like an enraged she-bear for her cubs. The veins stood out on her forehead, the cords in her neck. Her tongue lashed out at Pa, and the words cut into him like the crack of a blacksnake whip. She said Pa was the laughingstock of the valley with his big talk and his shiftlessness. She said the valley women, poor creatures that they were, had only pity for her. She said the bread Pa ate was from sweat of hers, the poor clothes on his back.

"And your son is barefoot!" Ma spat the words at Pa.

Pa cowered under them like a hound-dog under a rafter's boot, his eyes shifting this way and that. Sensing her advantage with Dwyer waiting outside, Ma said Pa could drop dead at her feet before she'd set pen to paper until the money was laid in the palm of her hand.

"You'll sign or I'll get no more work from Dwyer." Pa turned sullen.

"You'll get work from him long as you owe him, and you'll always owe him!"

And in the end, caught between her and Dwyer, Pa went down. He laid the money in Ma's hand as, white to the eyes, he said, "Peace, woman!" Ma's hand shook so she could barely hold the pen as she wrote her name under Pa's on the paper, and when he took the paper out to Matt Dwyer she hid the roll of bills safe under the bodice of her dress with all the miracle of it in her eyes while the tears slipped down her face. The tears were different from the despairing storm in the wagon. They were like a soft healing rain.

"It was God." Awe was in Ma's voice, and reverence. She caught Rand to her, pressed her wet cheek hard against his. "He heard my prayers, Rand. He heard!"

She was his lodestar, but like Pa, Rand knew only the valley, the wooded hills. He lay in his bed in the attic with his back against the chimney, warm in winter, listening to the bark of foxes, the call of whippoorwills, the scream of a wildcat, familiar sounds. And the team . . . Mac and Bess! Over him crept a desolate loneliness, a shaking dread. He crept out of bed and stealthily down the ladder to Tige, curled at its foot, and with Tige, limp and docile in his arms, climbed back. Tige stretched out in the bed beside him, but Tige snoozed with a weather ear cocked for Ma in the lean-to, and Rand slept fitfully with one arm clutching Tige to him, dreaming that rock oil had gushed up from the brook bed in a fountain that broke at the top into a spray, and glittering in the spray were rings with blue sets, shining bracelets to match; but even as he dreamt, he heard the dust-padded thud of galloping hoofs.

A strange sound woke him. It was Ma, and she was singing. Never before had he heard her sing outside of meeting. She sang, "'Why should I doubt Thy grace or yield to dread despair?'" Her voice was full and sweet with a joyous lilt in it. Downstairs she had the fire already going, the red-checked tablecloth spread, the table set. She caught Rand to her, buried her face in his shock of sandy hair. Then with a fold of her skirt in either hand, she pranced through a figure of the square

dance, forward, bow, and back, singing to the tune of the "Opera Roll":

*"First two gents cross over
And by the lady stand;
The side two gents pass over
And we'll all join hands."*

She caught Rand's hands, swinging him.

*"Oh, her name is Sal and she's your gal, s-o-o-o-o
Allemand left, and do, si do-o-o-o!"*

Tige leaped around her, barking, and she ended, breathless, on the bench, with laughter crowding tears, fanning herself with her apron.

Pa came to the door of the lean-to, his face a sullen red as he slipped the braces of his jeans over his shoulders, and Ma knelt before the fire, dishing up breakfast. She had just set the coffeepot and the bowl of porridge on the table when Tige's ears came up, and he stood rigid, listening. He hurled himself against the door, barking loud welcome, and they looked through the screen to see Willie Maguire racing up the lane. The rolls of fat above Willie's jeans jounced as he raced; his fat cheeks and his buttocks quivered. Ma looked at Pa, her forehead wrinkled. She said, wondering, "It can't be May. She isn't due." Willie reached the door and leaned against the frame to catch his breath, his chest heaving.

"Speak up, lad!" A sharp note in Ma's voice goaded Willie. "What is it?"

"D-D-Drake!" Gasping, Willie stuttered. "D-D-Drake—st-t-truck—oil."

It hung in the air as Ma stood looking at Willie as motionless as if she'd turned to stone. She stood like that a long minute with that anxious, inquiring look at Willie fixed on her face, and then turning to the table, she jerked the tablecloth from it. A bowl, dribbling porridge, rolled into a corner as Ma slowly ripped the tablecloth into strips while little beads of foam bubbled from between her lips to form a white froth. Strips of the

tablecloth, fragments of dishes, smears of porridge, and a pool of coffee lay around her on the floor. And then when the last strip fluttered from her fingers Ma walked to the hickory rocker by the fire and sat down in it. Rocking, one hand on either arm, she seemed to shrink, to shrivel and grow old, and a shrill, eerie laugh burst from her throat that froze Rand and Pa in their tracks and sent Tige slinking under the table.

A voice from the doorway, another head beside Willie's, brought Pa out of it. Potter, who was Dwyer's stableman, had come for the team. Pa turned to Ma, but Ma only rocked with that queer vacant look in her eyes and the twelve hundred dollars under the bodice of her dress.

"You go." Pa turned to Rand. "I—I can't."

Bess whinnied when Rand opened the barn door. She nuzzled him all over as he stood on the feedbox to fasten her collar, looking for the carrot. She kept nuzzling him as he backed her up to the wagon, turning her head to watch him as he fastened the tugs. Potter tied his horse to the back of the wagon then, got up on the seat, and picked up the whip. The whip cracked along Bess's flank and, willing, Bess and Mac sprang into the collar.

Realization swept over Rand, and as the wagon rumbled down the lane he ran alongside, one hand on Bess's flank, and with Tige at his heels. The wagon turned into the Creek road; stabbing pain cut up under Rand's heart, and his breath came in gasps; the whip cracked again; Bess leaped forward; the distance between Rand and the wagon lengthened. Running, he stumbled, went down on his hands and knees, and the last thing he saw was Tige, standing there in the middle of the road, looking from him to the wagon and back to him. Flat in the road, Rand dropped his head in his arms, and his tears wet the dust.

"Ma!" It tore up through his chest in a sob of despairing loss. "Ma!"

5

MA ROCKED ON WHILE MEN SWARMED UPON THE valley like bees to buckwheat; by team and wagon, on foot, and on horseback. They clung to the roof and the sides of the stage rolling into Titusville, begrimed with sweat and dust. They poured off the river boats at Cornplanter, slipped and slid across rocky clearings, waded mountain streams. They slept in the lobby chairs at the American House in Titusville, on the floors of the halls, and in the valley haylofts; great strapping men, pushing and hoarse-voiced with the get-rich-quick fire in their eyes.

Ma rocked, unheeding, but across the Creek May Maguire put her foot down. Figures on paper meant nothing to May. Beegle, the shoemaker from Titusville, had only three hundred dollars, but he promised a fourth of the oil. Stubbornly May sniffed, her plump hands folded across her swollen body, her mouth set, refusing to touch pen to paper, rage as Patrick would.

"I was born in this house, and I'll die in this house," May said plaintively.

"And a silk dress!" Beegle was hoarse, dust-covered. Sweat streaked his face. May's eyes turned wistful. She said, "I always wanted me a silk dress. Red with jet braid on it."

"And a fine figure of a woman you'll be in it!" Beegle's eyes admired her as he shoved the pen into her hand.

But the Reverend Ezekiel Cotton would have no traffic with Caesar on the Sabbath, and the men who galloped on sweat-dark horses to his door hurried on. By Monday the news had spread, and the reverend had heard it. Four men from Mead-

ville pooled the savings of a lifetime to meet the reverend's price of fifty thousand dollars and an eighth of the oil. Mercy, the reverend's wife, stolidly sloshed greasy water over the dinner dishes while the reverend dickered; but called from the dishpan to sign the paper, she dried her hands on her apron and signed. Then she took a hammer and smashed every dish in the house.

And by the time Matt Dwyer's lathered stallion had reached the top of the Prestons' lane that Sunday night, Simon had just pulled up to a stop ahead of him. It was Simon who called Sam Preston aside.

"Myself, I dunno." Simon shrugged, his hands palms up. "But let a man come to buy from me on a winded horse, and I ask myself why. Mebbe I know why, and mebbe I don't, but if it's that bad he wants what I got, it's as good to me as it is to him, ain't?"

So Sam Preston, a wiry, slack-chinned little man who had tried for five years to sell his farm for twelve hundred dollars, still owned it when along the valley ran the cry, "Oil!" And Sam turned greedy. He said, "It's theirs if they want it—at my price!" His price was a quarter of a million dollars and an eighth of the oil, and the Preston place sold at Sam's price to a company of men from Pittsburgh.

So it was the Bole cabin that Dwyer used for his office, moving in to sit with bewhiskered Abiel Slade, the notary from Titusville, at Ma's deal table, scrubbed white; and as the stream of men came and went, money piled up on the table in front of them: green stacks of bills, silver columns of dollars, white piles of drafts.

"Stay if you want to." Dwyer brushed Pa's offer of rent aside. "Long as you keep out of the way."

It rained, and the men brought mud with them; the floor was slippery with it. They spat toward the fireplace, and tobacco juice dribbled down the whitewashed stones to cake on the hearth while one acre along the Creek sold for twice as much as Dwyer had paid for the farm, with always an eighth of the oil for Dwyer; and the half of that acre, sublet, sold for as

much again as men in a mad, spiraling frenzy fought for a toe hold on the Creek.

Through all of it Ma rocked; through the mud and sweat, tobacco smoke, the sizzle of spittle against hot stone. Sometimes she ran her fingers restively through her hair, that queer vacant look in her eyes, and sometimes she burst into song. The hoarse, frenzied voices of the men, the crackle of bills and drafts, the clink of coins drowned Ma's voice singing, " 'Why should I doubt Thy grace and yield to dread despair?' " Always it was that or, " 'Oh, her name is Sal and she's your gal.' " Old Doc Hayes from Cornplanter peered at Ma over his spectacles through the smoke and said it must be Ma's age. Sometimes they came out of it, Doc said, and sometimes they didn't.

"Let 'er rock," Doc said, "and don't contrary her."

The team was gone, and Pa let the crops, such as they were, rot in the field. The roll of bills was pinned inside the pocket of his jeans now. The maples had turned crimson and gold against the hemlock; dry leaves on the forest floor rustled under his feet; Tige flushed coveys of game birds. And a ride as far as the company store was to be had for the asking in any of the rumbling train of buckboards and wagons along the Creek road. Settling on the bench on the porch in the warm sun of Indian summer with the valley men who had bought iron safes and sat down to live on their royalties, Pa let John Brown's defense of himself to the jury roll from his tongue with fine fire, punctuated by yawns from his audience. More than likely when Pa had done, the valley men would wink at each other as one of them drawled, "Lemme see, Bole—what royalty you gettin' on your place?"

Rand took to staying with Ma, and now and again Matt Dwyer brought Petty to the cabin with him in his buckboard behind the spanking team. Petty wore a blue cloak with bands of beaver edging the shoulder cape. She wore a blue bonnet with a wide brim that framed her face and matched her eyes. Pendant from the ribbon around her neck under the shining hair was a tiny beaver muff. Eyes wide, she circled Ma's chair warily. Ma's hair hung in two sketchy braids now. Rand

braided it as he'd braided Bess's tail and Mac's. May Maguire, up from childbed, had washed and ironed Ma's dress, but the dress didn't look like Ma. It looked like May, limp and sleazy.

"She's the witch, Papa!" Petty backed away, her hands over her eyes. "The witch in *Hansel and Gretel*!"

Chuckling, Matt Dwyer took her on his knee at the table, let her run the bills and coins through her fingers; but when she turned naughty he said, "Be Papa's good girl, or he'll leave you with the witch."

Jubilant over a quick deal, he caught her up, tossed her high. Sometimes he stood her on the table, and she spoke a piece for the men. Standing there among the bills and drafts and coins, Petty recited in sweet treble:

*"Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is begining to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
That is known as the children's hour."*

She was pretty, like an angel, and always in the tiny muff Petty had a sack of red-striped peppermint lozenges. Sometimes she sucked one in either cheek, and, watching her from the hearth, Tige drooled until his saliva dripped to mingle with the spittle on the warm stone. One day she held a lozenge high over Tige's head.

"Speak!" she said, and when, drooling, Tige spoke, she popped the lozenge into her own mouth, laughing. Led on, Tige leaped up and, a paw on either of her shoulders, licked her face. Petty screamed and stumbled backward; Matt Dwyer vaulted the table. His boot caught Tige in the ribs. Tige bared his teeth; his hair stood up on his back in a ridge. Rand jumped in front of him, but Matt Dwyer shoved Rand aside, seized Pa's chair, and, bashing Tige into a corner with it, kicked him until Tige lay beaten, senseless.

"Christ's sake, Dwyer!" It was Benson from Titusville.

"I've had enough of that damned hound!" Dwyer turned upon Rand. "And of you! Keep your place, if you want a roof over your head."

He took Petty on his knee and dried her tears, while Rand, on his knees in the corner, clutched Tige's body to him, his teeth clenched in helpless rage. Tige moved in Rand's arms, his tail wagged feebly, but his right hind leg healed crooked, and he went on three legs.

Then when the last acre was let and Dwyer and the hoarse, frenzied men were gone, Jennie Preston came to say good-by, she that had been Jennie Blood before Sam Preston married her six weeks after he buried his first wife. The Prestons were moving to Titusville, lock, stock, and barrel. Jennie took off her bonnet and rolled up her sleeves. She was a drab woman with mousy hair that strayed from the sparse knot in wisps down her neck. Her hands were rough and red, work-knotted. Her eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles were watery and harried. There was talk in the valley of how, come a barn-raising, Sam Preston wormed himself into the dance sets with the young and prettiest girls, and they said Sam would be up to some high jinks now. Jennie had brought her own bucket and brush and broom, her lye and soap.

"Maybe your ma knows what's going on," Jennie said, "and maybe she don't, but a body can't sleep of a night for thinking she does, and your ma liked things nice."

Ma rocked while Jennie and Rand scrubbed and scoured, and Jennie talked of Ma as if Ma were dead. She said, "Never a likelier girl than her ever set foot in the valley." She said, "I can see her now in her dark red merino." And, sighing, Jennie said, "But one look at John Bole and she lost her head, seemed like."

Jennie said, too, that Jim Preston, the oldest of Sam's brood of six by his first wife, was going down East to school that winter. She said, "Sam's that petted on him, but he's give me nothing but trouble." Jennie's eyes smoldered while she scoured the hearth with lye and sand. "And he's got a sly streak in him, that one. Let them take it out that can!"

Her good-bys over at dusk, Jennie donned her rusty bonnet and picked up her bucket and brush. At the door she turned to look back. On their spikes against the wall shining kettles

and pans caught the firelight. Windowpanes glistened; the deal table and the floor were scrubbed white again. On the hearth browned loaves of Jennie's bread, a double baking, and the smell of them mingled with the scent of burning wood, lye, and soap, the pungent reek of oil from the Creek.

Jennie's eyes lingered on Ma. The full skirt of Ma's dress, starched crisp, stood out around Ma's chair. Her hair, newly washed and brushed, waved softly to the knot at her neck under the filmy cap Jennie had fashioned from the last Philadelphia handkerchief. Rocking, Ma sang again. Jennie's lip trembled as she stood there at the door with her bucket, but her eyes smoldered.

"We ain't either of us young any more," Jennie said, "but seems like a Bole could always take the heart out of a woman quicker even than most. You be a good boy, Rand, and say your prayers. She was mighty petted on you."

But Pa sold the cow for lack of feed and a woman to churn. He sold the chickens and pigs. Supplies came from the company store, even flour and potatoes and soap. Rand fed a feeble fire with chips scraped up from the woodpile, and he and Ma shivered in its meager warmth until Pa borrowed the Maguires' team to haul wood. The valley men had moved from the porch of the company store to the red potbellied stove inside, and Pa moved with them. Rand was done with the Blood schoolhouse. Somebody had to stay with Ma, to keep the fire going, the kettle bubbling on the crane, while the Creek froze over and the icy wind roaring through the valley piled snow window-high against the cabin.

The valley was a vast white silence except for men jigging down scattered wells. A spring pole over a fulcrum, the tools suspended from one end of the pole, one foot each in a stirrup, teams of hardier men kicked the tools inch by inch into the frozen earth, and the valley answered with icy gales driving whirling funnels of snow.

But the talk was oil, fountains of it, floods, and at twenty dollars a barrel. May Maguire wore only the silk dress now from dawn to dusk. Milk overflowing from her huge breasts

stained the front of it, sweat made great half moons on it under her arms, but, fiddling, Patrick said, "Let 'er wear it. There's more where it come from, ain't there?" Patrick put the new teacher at the Blood schoolhouse in her place when she said Willie had little capacity for learning.

"He's got a dad," Patrick told her, "that c'n buy 'im the best gol-durned capacity on the market!"

While Pa and Tige trailed deer, Ma rocked and Rand lay on his stomach before the fire, his finger following the printed lines of the *Venango County Courier*. He labored through *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. Then as the printed word came easier he took down from the mantel Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* even while Ma, rocking, sang, "'Why should I doubt Thy grace?'" Eyes wide with fascinated horror, his heart thudding, Rand turned the pages. There was no hell-fire. There was no God.

And the nights were long and dark and cold. Dragging his crooked leg, Tige burrowed for warmth into a snowdrift at the foot of the ladder. Rand huddled against the warm chimney while the winter blast shrieked down from the hills, mingled with the high thin howl of roaming wolf packs. There was no heaven of golden gardens already cleared, but there was Main Street in Titusville. Word had seeped through the valley that Matt Dwyer was building a fine house there, that the conservatory where roses would bloom in winter was to cost fifty thousand dollars. Main Street was a world of bright lamps, soft carpets, the perfume of flowers. It was where Petty lived.

The blast roared; wolf packs howled; and, shivering, Rand drew the covers over his head, buried his face in his pillow to whimper through chattering teeth, "Ma!" Then bolstering himself, he bit down on his teeth, promising with fine bravado, "Someday I'll live in a fine house. I'll buy Petty ribbons and rings. *But I'll kick Matt Dwyer till he never walks again.*"

6

WITH SPRING THE VALLEY TURNED BLACK. IT WAS the black of oil-soaked soil; the black of smoke-grimed derricks lacing the sky, of staring, cheap shanties, of tanks with networks of pipes running helter-skelter, of coal dumps; the black of the Creek with its thick coating of oil, rippling opalescent, of slippery scows; the black of oil-slimed mud, charred trees; a black punctuated by flaming gas flares, white puffs of steam from engines, by a bright green jet as a gusher shot its column of oil into the sunlight against the background of hemlocks.

There was the scream of sawmills; the hammering of cooperage shops; the creak of walking beams sawing the air; the hoarse shouts of blackened men with the glint of madness in their eyes; the winding horn of the stage from Titusville to Cornplanter, newly dubbed Oil City; the whistles of horse-drawn Creek boats with royalty-rich women of the valley under their awnings; the swish of blacksnake whips as crawling lines of horses and mules strained to drag wagons hub-deep in the slime; the frenzied cursing of teamsters, boatmen.

The legs and bellies of the horses were hairless from the blistering slime of oil and mud, the oil and water of the Creek. Slowly melting jagged spears of ice along the Creek banks cut into their flesh; the red of their blood swirled in crimson streaks through the black as under the swishing blacksnakes they strained into their collars to drag the flat-bottomed scows loaded with coal and tools from Oil City, stumbling along the rocky Creek bed. Slipping, they drowned; and, cut loose from the harness, their bloated bodies floated downstream.

So it was that Bess came home. Tige found her. Yelping,

hopping ahead on three legs, he led Rand to a Creek cove where Bess's carcass lay lodged, bloated to twice its size, the legs and belly hairless. Rand knew her by the white star on her forehead. Bess had come home on a pond freshet when the millers along the Creek opened the sluices of their dams to let loose the flood which bore the swirling mass of bulk boats, oil-freighted scows and guipers downstream to Oil City.

Tige bared his teeth; the hair stood up on his back in a ridge as teamsters, waist-deep in the black swirl, laid hold of Bess's carcass to drag it to midstream, committing it again to its journey with the tide. Tige ran along the bank, hopping and yelping, as the carcass floated past the lane on the dwindling flood. He stopped to look back at Rand, from Rand to the bobbing carcass, and back again to Rand.

"C'mon, Tige!" Rand turned back up the lane. He was twelve that summer, a tall, gangling boy in ragged jeans, bare-foot. His eyes beneath the sandy eyebrows, the tow-colored thatch, were cryptic, unflinching, old.

He alone knew from whose gun came the bullet that crashed through Mac's head that fall. On a strip of marshland along the Creek where the brook tumbled down through a wooded ravine the man Wellman from Cleveland had started to jig down a well. Unable to force the drill through the rock, he rigged a tumbling shaft and traded a sixteenth share in the well to a boatman for a broken-down horse. The horse was Mac; and, a sagging bag of bones, his wind broken, Mac furnished Wellman's power, eyes dull and head down, until the night Rand slipped down the ladder and took Pa's gun from its corner.

From the wooded ravine he could see Mac lying in the moonlight on a dry hillock, tethered to the derrick.

"Mac. . . Here, Mac!" It was a cajoling call Mac knew, and from the ravine. Mac's head came up; he stumbled to his feet. Rand sighted along the barrel; his finger closed on the trigger; the crashing echo came from the hills. He saw Mac go down on his knees, roll over, as he and Tige skirted stealthily back up the ravine.

But Matt Dwyer, the sunny-haired Petty, the stable of fine horses, the fat dappled pony and basket cart were gone from the valley to the fine house on Main Street in Titusville. The graveled drive winding from the stone pillars was a quagmire of more oil-slimed mud that threaded through the forest of derricks, blackened trees, puffing engines, coal piles, tanks, meandering pipe, gaping shanties. Only Abby Sloan, who had been the housekeeper, stayed on in the white frame house, blackened now by soot and smoke, the spatter of oil and mud fanning out from wagon wheels. There Abby ran her boarding house, and across the wide veranda ran a great sign which read: TRAVELERS' REST.

"It's high rent an' hard work," Abby said, "but there's worse things I could mention, and I can have my Danny with me."

In the oak-paneled dining room from which Aunt Celestia had once banished the governess, long planks on sawhorses served Abby for tables. There dapper oil buyers and lease scalpers rubbed elbows with drillers, teamsters, and diviners; the smell of onions and cabbage mingled with the stench of oil and sweat. At night men dropped, spent, to grimy cots still warm and dank with the sweat of other men, and the tide overflowed the house to the stables, turned on down the Creek on foot and on horseback.

Rand's bed was brought down from the attic to wait hospitably against the wall opposite the fireplace, and Rand slept on a sketchily stuffed tick against the chimney. Pa waved all offer of payment grandly aside, glad of an audience. "Such as it is, it's yours," Pa said, so Happy Cochran, a tipling teamster, put up with them, a sodden sounding board for Pa. Happy kept his team and wagon in the barn, and on a bench before the fire he swigged from his brown jug while Pa told him what was what.

"By God, Happy, no house divided against itself can stand!" Pa roared and, swigging, Happy wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

"Bole, you're a smart man." Hiccuping, Happy slapped his

knee. "And you've got the right of it, man! Yes, sir, you're right. Right as rain."

One day Pa hitched a ride with Happy as far as Cherry Tree, and Happy started off singing at the top of his voice. Singing, he stood up in the wagon and began to belabor the team with his blacksnake. "Get up there into the collar, damn you!" Happy roared, and the team took off with the wagon careening. The wagon overturned, the traces gave way, and freed, the team took off, dragging Happy, tangled in the reins, along the rutted road. When the men came running from the porch of the company store to head them off, they found Happy a lifeless mass of bleeding pulp. Righting the wagon, they found Pa pinned under it, but Pa got up and brushed himself off, fit as a fiddle.

"God don't want John Bole," they said in the valley, "and the devil won't have him."

But twice in that strange pageant of lodgers Pa met his match. One night as Ma rocked, singing, Tige stiffened on the hearth, his ears came up. Above the creak of walking beams, the chug of engines, they heard an imperative rap on the door, and Pa opened the door upon an outlander standing there in the dusk with the snow swirling around him. He wore a long black coat with an astrakhan collar, a soft felt hat pulled down over his eyes. "Such as it is, it's yours." Pa waved him in.

He stood on the hearth, an elegant figure in wide pantaloons, congress gaiters. His dark hair waved back from a high full forehead. His eyes under dark brows were mesmeric, compelling. In them was the quicksilver light of swiftly shifting mood. His hands were white and soft as he spread them before the fire.

"Ah!" His voice was vibrant, amused. His eyes came to rest on Pa's books. "Among us an admirer of the immortal bard?"

"I'm a man of letters, myself." Pa lit his pipe from the fire with a squib, settled back in the chair, crossed his knees, and cleared his throat. But the lodger had turned from the fire and struck a pose there on the hearth, one hand inside the collar of his coat. His eyes were fixed above their heads as if upon an

unseen audience, and the words that rolled from his mouth might have been born of some raging torrent from within the man himself:

*"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."*

His voice, resounding, filled the corners, echoed to the rafters, and died away. In the hush was only the creak of beams, the chug of engines, the wail of winter wind around the cabin as Ma ran her fingers through her hair and Tige suddenly threw up his head in a mournful howl.

"What'd you say your name was?" Pa seemed to have shrunk in his chair.

"Booth!" An arrogant little smile played around his mouth. "John Wilkes Booth."

It was the Funk well across the Creek on the Maguire place which brought the second lodger who set Pa back on his heels. Funk had sublet from Beegle, jiggered down a dry well, and thrown in the sponge, but his son had laid hold of a coughing engine, drilled on to the next sand. He said, "China's down there somewheres, and by God, if I don't strike oil I'll strike tea!" It was April. Blazing gas flares dotted the deepening dusk, iron stoves glowed red through the gaping doors of shanties, when a man on horseback turned into the lane, his horse caked to the flanks and belly with oil-slimed mud, yet singularly free of it himself when Pa opened the door upon him standing there with his saddlebags over his arm.

"Such as it is, it's yours." Pa waved him in.

He was a young man, twenty or so, tall and rawboned, but he carried himself with a grave dignity. Lean, handsome, with strong jaws and a large firm mouth, he wore black broadcloth, a high stock collar, and black cravat. Drooping eyelids gave

the effect of languor, but when he looked up the intent scrutiny of his eyes made Pa shuffle in his boots. And as he sat in the hickory chair by the fire, power seemed to emanate from him, as if the man embodied within himself some natural force, impersonal, relentless, like fire and flood and roaring blast.

"What'd you say your name was?" Pa lit his pipe with a squib from the fire, crossed his knees, and settled back.

"Rockefeller." He set down neat rows of small figures in a little paper-backed notebook.

"And what'd you say your politics was?"

Rockefeller looked up from the figures, and under the long, intent scrutiny Pa shifted, uneasy.

"I didn't say." The eyes dropped to the figures. Finished with them, Rockefeller stowed the notebook in his waistcoat pocket, took out a small leather-bound copy of the Scriptures, and sat there reading from it, apart, preoccupied, while from outside came the swish of blacksnakes, the frenzied cursing shouts of teamsters as horses knee-deep in the slime toiled up the lane. Inside was only the endless sound of Ma's rocker, now and then the crumble of a dying ember, the rustle of the *Courier* behind which Pa had subsided, Tige's snore from the hearth.

Next morning the man Rockefeller had just bowed his head in silent grace over his bowl of porridge when the chugging engines were suddenly throttled and walking beams creaked to a stop; there was the sound of running feet, and from derrick to shanty and wagon ran the shout, "Strike! Funk's hit the sand!" Pa jumped up, overturned the bench. Rockefeller rose calmly from the table. Pa seized the long pole for the makeshift raft, but Rockefeller's eyes came to cool focus upon him, stopped Pa in his tracks.

"The boy will do," Rockefeller spoke. "I never use a man for a boy's work."

Across the Creek excitement ran high as driller, teamster, boatman clambered atop tank and barrel and shanty. Patrick Maguire squatted on his doorstep, his fiddle under his chin, and mingled with the hiss of escaping gas came the lilting notes of

"Chase the Squirrel." May Maguire leaned in the doorway, big again with child, and soiled silk spanned her swollen body.

"Come, boy!" The man Rockefeller took his stand at a cautious distance within the shadow of the house, his black broadcloth a somber note beside May's flamboyant silk.

Inside the derrick a column of water suddenly rose and fell back. With a mighty roar the gas burst forth like the loosing of a thunderbolt, blotting the derrick from sight. It cleared away; a greenish-golden column shot from the derrick floor to break at the crown pulley and fall in a golden shower that covered the ground, the budding branches of the trees, and flowed in a swelling stream downhill to the Creek. Clouds of gas hung low; the hillside was as if a freshet had passed over it. Sweating, shouting, men threw dams across the torrent; the dams overflowed, swept away. And above the roar and shouting rose the mournful mooring of a cow.

"Pa!" It was May Maguire's penetrating plaint. "You hear Daisy?"

"Let her beller!" Patrick's fiddle had a carefree, triumphant lilt. "I milked that goddamned cow for the last time, woman!"

The flow overran what barrels and tanks the scurrying Funk could beg and borrow, and he shouted to the boatmen to take what they could at fifty cents the barrel. Boats swarmed to the Creek bank; boatmen fought for place; and when one of them wrangled about short measure, Funk, wild-eyed and triumphant, opened the valve wide and swamped his boat. Beside Rand, the man Rockefeller looked at his watch.

"Come, boy!" He laid a cool hand on Rand's shoulder.

Rand saddled the horse and led it from the barn to where Rockefeller waited with his saddlebags at the top of the lane. Mounting, Rockefeller disposed the saddlebags neatly, took the reins in one hand, looked down at Rand while the other hand went to his pocket. Rand's eyes met the intent scrutiny, cryptic, unflinching, old. Rockefeller leaned down then to lay a shining coin in his hand.

"Waste not, want not." Rockefeller spoke with a kindly pat on the tow-colored thatch, gravely admonishing, and then

there was only the sound of his horse's hoofs in the oily ooze while Rand stood looking down at the coin in his hand. He tossed it high to glint in the sun, caught it. He skimmed it then toward a white puff of steam from Wellman's new engine in the marsh, watched Tige scramble after it on a bootless errand. After Mac, Wellman had traded a sixteenth in his well for a coughing engine and ten bushels of coal. The coal gone, he traded another sixteenth for a shotgun and eighty dollars, but he was scraping bottom again.

It was dusk when Pa came back from Cherry Tree with the *Courier*, his face mottled, his eyes ablaze. In great black letters across the *Courier* were the words: SUMTER FALLS. Pa took a stand on the hearth, one hand in the strap of his jeans, fixed his fiery gaze over Rand's head and Ma's as if on an unseen audience, and let the valiant words roll forth.

"'No nation can exist, half slave and——'"

A hiss, a mighty roar drowned the words, the sound of running feet. The chug of engines died, the creak of beams as fires were hastily doused under boilers, on forges, and above the roar of gas ran the hoarse shout, "Wellman! She's in!" Pa dropped his pose, shouted to Rand, "You stay with Ma!" He was through the door then with Tige at his heels.

Rand could see it from the doorway, the low-hanging cloud of gas, the great greenish jet against the hills, breaking over the derrick in the sunset to shower men standing on dry hillocks in the marsh, men frantically digging trenches, throwing up a bank of earth to catch the flow. Inside the cabin, while the rabbit stew bubbled on the crane, Ma rocked, but as if she had caught the spirit of it, she sang, "'Oh, her name is Sal, and she's your gal.'"

Suddenly an explosion shook the cabin, sent Rand reeling backward, glass tinkling to the floor. He got to his feet, saw a great column of fire surge high into a black pall of smoke, catch tanks and barrels and derricks as men ran from it enveloped in sheets of flame. One flaming torch was Pa—Tige was with him, a hopping streak of fire. Running, Rand saw Pa fall, bury his face in the marsh, scramble up, and bound toward the

brook in the ravine. He fell again, and Tige, rolling over and over, lay still. Sobbing, Rand fought the hands that held him back, sank his teeth into them, while men defied the searing heat to drag Pa clear.

Pa died that night on the bed in the lean-to. Of his jeans there was a handful of charred remnants, and in Pa's pocket had been pinned what was left of the twelve hundred dollars. Within the orbit of the raging column of fire, smothered at last with earth and manure, were found nineteen charred bodies. Somebody had left live coals under a near-by boiler.

7

MA ROCKED, SINGING. SHE SANG, "WHY SHOULD I doubt Thy grace?" The red surge of blood sweeping to the roots of his tow-colored thatch, Rand stood beside the deal table while Joe Wadsworth, a strapping, bearded driller, dumped his battered, oil-soaked hat across the table, scattering coins. The hat had passed from boatman to teamster, from toolie to driller.

"There you are, son," Joe said gruffly. "Let 'er roll, and if she peters out on us, we'll drill deeper."

Wordless and flushed, Rand stood looking down at the coins while Ma sang. Joe had reached the door before, swallowing, Rand said, "Joe . . . I'm obliged to you."

"Obliged, hell!" Joe shot through the door.

So there was the hat money. There was Pa's gun, the rabbits and game birds. And there were the pond freshets when raft and guiper and bulk boat swirled down the Creek. Sometimes they collided, piled up on shoals, and, capsizing, left a thick coating of oil on the surface of the water. With the other dippers, Rand waded in, filling his bucket. Oil was twenty dollars a barrel.

And at night that winter there were the derrick lanterns twinkling through the thick curtains of snow, the glow of forges, the gas flares. The steady chug of engines, the clang of hammers on cherry-red bits drowned out the wolf's howl and kept prowling panther at bay. Ma slept safe in the lean-to. Rand missed Tige, but daytimes there were the crawling lines of teams, the hoarse shout of "Strike!" running feet, and the bright jets breaking over derricks.

The jets outstripped the barrel factories, tank works, flowed into the Creek. Seeping, they polluted water wells. Water, hauled on stoneboats from springs high in the hills, was fifty cents a barrel. Oil was ten cents and not worth the dipping. The Confederates headed north through Maryland under Lee, eighty thousand strong, and draft officers appeared at Titusville.

Half-drilled wells were abandoned; tubing was ripped from holes as clerk, storekeeper, shoemaker, and lawyer threw in the sponge, sold tools for what they'd bring. Teams went back to plowing and derricks were left to rot in the sun while down the Creek sailed men on rafts to the shrill of the fife, war-bound, the bucktails dangling from their hats, and on the bank miller and farmer shouted, "Onward, Bucktails! Onward!" Running along the bank, Rand strained his eyes to follow a strapping, bearded figure.

"Joe!" The raft swirled round the bend. "Joe . . . Good-by."

Then there was only the brooding hush as the valley wrapped a soft mantle of snow over its blackened scars. The blast roaring down from the hills whipped through derricks, and in it was the thin howl of roaming wolf packs; but Abby Sloan closed the door of Travelers' Rest behind her, and she and Danny moved in with Rand and Ma.

A doughty broad-beamed Dutch woman, Abby spoke her mind and let the chips fall. She said to Rand, "Nobody wants Danny 'long with me, and nobody wants you and your ma 'less it's th' county home, looks like, so we might's well make th' best of each other, and th' good Lord knows this roof is owin' to both of us from Matt Dwyer, an' then some!"

Abby brought her cookstove with her. It had an oven and a reservoir for hot water. She brought her new sewing machine. She put her foot down, and Rand went back to the Blood schoolhouse for the winter term.

"Danny's going," Abby said, "and he ain't goin' alone for what it'd cost me t' send you 'long with him. I guess mebbe there's some words you don't know yet even if you are a Bole."

Those were words Abby lived to eat. At one of the valley

spelling bees in the schoolhouse Rand spelled the bespectacled schoolma'am down.

"Sapphire." The new reverend at the Seceders' Church pronounced the word, and the schoolma'am hesitated.

"Sapphire—s-a-p-h-i-r-e," she said, and then, biting her lip, flushed to the roots of her hair; she sat down as Rand said, confident, "Sapphire—s-a-double-p-h-i-r-e."

"Sapphire?" Abby was awed. "Land sakes, what is it?"

"It's a blue set for rings and things," Rand said.

And declaiming at the box socials, his right hand under his coat, he fixed his gaze over the valley heads as if on a vast unseen audience. His deepening voice filled the corners, echoed to the rafters as the words rolled forth:

*"When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honor the charge they made!
Honor the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!"*

His audience yawned. Another chin-whacking Bole with calluses on his behind! Abby gave May Maguire as good as May sent. Not that Abby took much stock in a Bole, man or boy, but she took less in the Irish. Sniffing, she said to May, "A body'd be put to it, I guess, t' lay tongue t' two names that's got off their behind in this valley since Drake struck oil, and land knows what they're waitin' for!"

Somewhere within the voluminous folds of Abby's flannel petticoat was a hidden pocket. Abby had only to hike her calico skirt, reach down, and there was a dress length of dark red merino for Ma. Abby said, "I still mind th' way she looked time I saw her at th' Prestons' barn-raisin'." Sewing, Abby spiced the whirl of her machine with boardinghouse gossip while May Maguire drank it in thirstily. There were nineteen rooms in the new Preston house on Main Street in Titusville and sixty-four windows. Any fine day, from what Abby heard,

Jennie Preston could be seen sitting on a window sill shining one of those windows.

"Seems like Jennie can't get th' hang o' bein' rich," Abby said, "but land knows them young'uns o' Sam Preston's caught on quick enough."

Young Jimmy Preston, Sam's oldest by his first wife, was going down East to school again that winter but not to the same school. Abby said, "I guess you mind th' time, May, he poured rock oil on one o' Jennie's settin' hens and set fire to it. Seems like him and Petty Dwyer might's well up and marry each other someday. No use as I can see t' spoil two families."

On his stomach before the fire with his book, Rand looked up.

"Is she still pretty?" he said, and Abby fixed him with a dour eye.

"Pretty!" Abby snorted. "Her? Humph! That little slut always did look like th' running gears of a katydid to me, an' she always will."

Abby hiked her skirt again that spring, and there was a cow in the barn, another bay team and wagon, a pig in the pen, chickens in the coop. She and Rand put a crop in among the listing derricks while Ma rocked in her dark red merino, singing.

"He's a Bole, and he ain't a Bole," Abby told Simon that spring. "Seems like he's willing enough and, land knows, once he gets a notion into his head, th' devil himself wouldn't get it out."

"Sapphires!" Chuckling, Simon counted the coins and crumpled bills on the table before him. "'Simon,' he says to me, 'sapphires come high, don't they?'"

"Course no Bole ever lived could talk any bigger'n he does." Abby admitted it to Simon. "And oil! There ain't that much oil in th' valley as he's going t' have someday, I tell him, and if there was and 'twas all his, what good is it?"

Oil! It was the invention of the devil to Abby. Not one well in ten had paid for itself. Not more than one in twenty had

filled its owner's pocket half as full as the pocket in Abby's petticoat, remembrance of Travelers' Rest. Abby said, "And them that their oil didn't burn to a cinder, it broke their hearts wide open."

Yet an occasional well along the Creek, still doggedly pumping, had built more than one house on Main Street in Titusville or high on the bluff at Oil City, overlooking the river. There was young Archbold, a workman on the Creek at sixteen, a buyer for one of the refineries, and now a refiner himself. There was Captain Vandergrift, a cabin boy on a river steamer, the captain and owner of the fleet of steel guipers that rode the pond freshets and bought him the strip of land along the Creek from which the tide of green jets had washed him high. There were Barnsdall and Benson. McKelvy, Taylor, and Satterfield. And across the Creek, curtains of Nottingham lace whipped in the wind from the Maguire windows while May Maguire could no longer endure the feel of anything but silk against her skin, and Willie Maguire lived at the Stevens Hotel in New York, a young dandy about town with his swinging cane and gay cravats, his hard hat cockily atilt as he lit Havana cigars with dollar bills.

The Rebels were turned back at Gettysburg; the blockade was off. The railroad crawled from Erie to Corry, from Corry to Titusville; there were improvements in lamps. Buyers for the refineries came down the Creek again on horseback. Archbold and Vandergrift paid four dollars a barrel at the well, six dollars, eight. And again men swarmed upon the valley, hoarse-voiced and with that same glint of madness in their eyes, to snatch at lapsed leases. Lines of teams crawled again in the mud, saws screamed in the hills, engines chugged, lanterns twinkled from rig and shanty, the stage driver's horn echoed back from the hills, and valley women, rich again, stepped from Creek bank into canopied horse-drawn passenger boats.

May Maguire waved graciously to Abby from under the canopy, and Abby snorted, "There's a woman that makes me tired t' look at her!" Abby set her cookstove out under the cherry tree, laid more planks on sawhorses. The planks groaned

under great platters of pork and venison and bear meat, bowls of soup beans, potatoes bursting their skins, mountains of biscuits, applesauce. Buyers rubbed elbows along the planks with driller, pumper, and roustabout, eating in shifts, and coins from their pockets jingled in the tin pan at the end of the table while Abby dished up from steaming kettles and Ma, rocking, sang, hammers clanged on hot bits, and hens cackled.

But in this second tide was a treacherous undercurrent: men discharged from the Army and dark-browed, tough-jawed deserters, quick on the trigger; glib-tongued sharpers from New York, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia who bought abandoned wells, mailed out glowing circulars with pictures of flowing wells, and sold stock. They buzzed around Abby and her tin pan of coins like bees in buckwheat until Abby took the steaming teakettle from the stove.

"I was born in this valley," Abby snorted, "and 'twasn't yesterday, neither. Git!"

She took to sleeping with her petticoat rolled under the corn-husk tick in the lean-to and Pa's gun beside the bed. She reached for the gun one night when she heard prowling footsteps around the cabin. She saw a man's head outlined against the window in the moonlight and let go with both barrels. It was near; so near that next day Trotter, the medicine man who had hit the valley with a wagonload of bottled cancer cure and lingered to sell stock for the hastily capitalized Maple Shade Oil Company, was gone from the valley, lock, stock, and barrel. Left were only the two bottles of cancer cure on Abby's shelf for which Abby, charmed as a bird by a snake, had hiked her skirt and reached down. The Maple Shade paid out for its far-flung stockholders at the rate of two hundred to one.

Even so, there was another hidden pocket inside Abby's stays. Rand was fifteen that summer; a teamster now and part of the mile-long line of straining teams, he cracked the black-snake and drew blood on hairless horseflesh. Falling, horses drowned in the three-foot slime of greasy trails; their carcasses, wagons, and oil were dragged to the side of the trail, and the

gap filled in. Teamsters earned their eight dollars a day, but scattered throughout the hills were squalid houses with cast-off strumpets from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia in them, and Abby held out an inexorable hand.

"If I die 'fore you're a man grown," she told Rand as she sewed his money inside her stays, "you'll know where 'tis, which is where no slut'll lay hand on it."

But there were those who got around Abby. There was Captain Luke Jones, dashing and debonair for all of the white streak in his hair and the limp he'd brought from Gettysburg where, a captain of cavalry, he'd been with Gregg when Gregg met Jeb Stuart head on. Thirteen dry holes the captain drilled with that unwavering look in his eye that wrought order in the motley crew around Abby's table. On his fourteenth, Abby hiked her skirt and reached down for the price of a last load of coal.

"He's touched," Abby said, shame-faced. "But land sakes, all of 'em that ain't thieves is touched. Seems like they can't eat or sleep till they see what's at the bottom of 'nother hole if they got t' dig it with their two hands."

And Abby's extra piece of pie was for Sam Spellacy, the rollicking young Irishman with his banjo and his rolling bass voice. Fresh from the old country, he'd fallen in with Willie Maguire at the Stevens Hotel in New York and caught the next train for the Creek.

"And th' more fool him!" The line of Abby's mouth softened as she said it, and it was the bride whom Sam went blithely back to fetch from Ireland who put Abby abreast of May Maguire. Young and slim and laughing, Melodia Spellacy settled into Sam's listing shanty like a hand in a glove with the voice of a thrush to Sam's banjo and the Irish lilt on her tongue. With cotton waste Melodia upholstered the chairs Sam whacked together from hemlock boughs. Gay calico curtains fluttered from the window, but on the table was finest Irish linen from Melodia's trunk. And any night while derrick lanterns twinkled and engines chugged, Melodia's voice could be heard to the twang of Sam's banjo and above his rolling bass:

*"We'll hang the temper screw upon the derrick stand,
Lay away the hammer and the drill,
For thirty days it's taken us to put 'er in the sand
From the little hemlock derrick on the hill."*

And in Melodia's trunk, bottomless as the pocket in Abby's petticoat, was the white lace gown she'd worn at the ball for Prince Edward and his princess, Alexandra, when they visited Dublin and Melodia danced the lancers in the royal set.

"It's like I told my friend, Miz Spellacy—her that mingled mostly with th' king and his wife in th' old country," Abby said to May Maguire. "There's shanty Irish, May, and then again there's Irish."

Irish lace! It came, fine as a cobweb, from Melodia's needle flashing in the firelight as she visited with Abby of a winter night and Abby, spent, rested tired feet while Ma rocked. From her lace, Melodia fashioned a cap for Ma and a fichu to go with the dark red merino.

"'Tis a pity!" Already expecting, Melodia watched Ma rock. "The poor woman no longer knows the handsome lad she bore."

"His father was a fine figure of a man." The line of Abby's mouth tightened. "And useless as tits on a tomcat. What a body don't know, I always said, won't hurt her."

Rand would be seventeen that summer. It was April; the morning sun was warm. Sweat crawled down his back under the flannel shirt. Mud clung to his hip boots, to his oil-soaked jeans, as he drew up alongside the loading platform at the Titusville station. Behind him, an endless line of teams waited their turn. The Creek mud blotted out the spokes of his wagon wheels, caked the hairless bellies of his horses welted from the blacksnake. Lather frothed under their collars and, their sides heaving, they hung their heads to let blood trickle from their nostrils.

On the platform, Chat Weatherbee, in shirt sleeves and vest, ran a weather eye down Rand's shipping bill, checked it against his load, while through the open windows of the station

came the busy click of telegraph instruments. Suddenly Chat stiffened, his ear cocked.

"God A'mighty!" Chat went white; the shipping bill shook in his hand. "Booth . . . actor fellow . . . *shot Lincoln!*"

Rand rolled the last barrel from the wagon bed to the platform, upended it, and, straightening, stood rigid. From under arching maples in new tender leaf, a blooded bay mare, her slim neck arched, picked her way daintily across the tracks. Riding her was a slim girl in a long blue skirt and tight little jacket, her shining hair breeze-tossed. With her on a dancing stallion was young Jim Preston. The April sun was reflected in the high polish of his boots, and Petty was prettier than ever.

PITHOLE! THE WORD RACED ALONG THE CREEK LIKE wildfire, along whirring wires and in black headlines across the continent. Strike at Pithole. Thousand-barrel wells breaking over derricks at thirteen dollars a barrel! In cities, hastily capitalized companies by the hundreds sent out gaudy circulars with pictures of flowing wells; frenzied investors formed long lines before their offices, fighting for place, waving handfuls of bills.

The Creek road was black with horsemen, men on foot, lines of wagons mired behind straining horses and mules, Pithole-bound; honest men and rogues, rich and poor, laborer and gambler and harlot. They sank in mud to their knees, leaped from log to stump to boulder across hill and stream with food and bedding on their backs. They slept on piles of hemlock boughs, in farmers' barns, on piles of carpenters' shavings. General Avery, mustered out at Appomattox, leaped on his horse, racing for Pithole, battle-hardened officers and privates in his wake. Pithole! On to Pithole!

Abby's table was deserted overnight, but by now her petticoat sagged from the weight of the pocket in it, and content, Abby said, "A body's got t' rest her feet sooner or later, anyways."

They sat at supper, Abby and Rand, Danny and Ma, in the early spring twilight. The rumble and roll of wagon wheels, the thud of hoofbeats from the Creek road were only vaguely distant thunder. The fire crackled on the hearth, and gleaming skillets and kettles on the wall caught its light. On the table was a plate of Abby's bread, snowy and light, pink slices of

ham, applesauce, and a yellow pitcher of milk floating clots of cream, Abby's freshly churned butter.

"I don't know what more we'd want than we got." Abby looked contentedly around the room. "A body c'n eat just so much, an' they can't sleep in no more'n one bed."

Rand said nothing, his eyes on his plate, and Abby went on: "Course, teamin' ain't goin' t' be what it was, with everybody an' his dog chasin' t' Pithole, but it'll give us a chance t' put in a crop, an' we'll eat when them that's got t' gallivant over th' country t' pour money down a hole is wonderin' where their next meal is comin' from."

Rand looked up. He said, "I'm through with teaming, and I've put in my last crop."

"You have, have you?" It was more Bole big talk, and Abby swallowed it good-naturedly. "I guess mebbe you heired quite a piece o' money lately, ain't you?"

"You've got money of mine," Rand said.

"That's so, too," Abby said, "but I ain't ready for you t' heir it yet, and I ain't of a mind t' have any Bole settin' on his behind round here."

"I'm going into oil," Rand said.

"You are, are you?" Abby got up to tie a bib around Ma's neck. "An' you still wet behind th' ears? And your ma settin' here, touched in th' head? Not much, you ain't! I ain't touched, anyways."

Rand pushed his plate back and got up from the table. Abby stood beside Ma with a doughty fist on either hip. Rand's jaw shot forward. Their voices rose in hot wrangling. Danny sat scowling at Rand. Ma's eyes, with that queer vacant look in them, went from Abby to Rand, and her spoon began to shake in her hand.

"You'll give me my money or I'll take it from you," Rand said, and Danny got up from the table to stand beside him, scowling.

"I guess you won't, either," Abby said, confident. "Not where I'm keepin' it."

But that wasn't any John Bole looking out of Rand's eyes

as he came around the table toward her with Danny dragging at him. It was Sarah Bole herself with her mind made up, and Sarah Bole ten times over. It was a look that said he'd tear the stays from her very body. Abby backed slowly up as he came on. She came to Ma's rocker by the fireplace, and behind her, her hand closed over Pa's gun in the corner.

"Let th' Bole lay hand on me that dares!" Abby's eyes were steady along the barrel of the gun. "Stand away from 'im, Danny, you hear me?" She backed Rand up step by step to the door. "So you'd bite th' hand that fed you, would you? Not much, you won't! You'll git, or I'll let daylight through you."

He was in the wagon then behind the straining team and, sobbing, he stood up in the wagon, laid the blacksnake along the hairless sides of the horses, and drew blood. Avery had sent out a call for men with Army experience. He got them—and Rand. Still in his battle-stained, mud-caked uniform, Avery organized a train of fifty teams to haul the flooding oil out, the empty barrels in. It was teaming, but a gold mine! Every board and every nail for ballooning hotels and brothels, stores, warehouses, saloons, banks, and theaters had to be hauled from Titusville or Oil City. A man and his team were worth forty dollars a day.

A gold mine and hell on wheels. Straining over roads cut through the forest, over boulder and stump, horses dropped to smother in flooding masses of slush. Rand slept in his wagon, shivering and unwashed in his mud-caked, oil-soaked jeans and hip boots, one hand on his money belt, the other on his pistol. He woke to kick his spent horses to their feet. Christ!

But the forest of derricks sprang from the ground like mushrooms. The Astor House was built in one day. The Morey Hotel had gaslight, steam heat, a telegraph office, scurrying colored waiters. The Patchen House on Holmden Street had four floors. In its ornate lobby slick-tongued promoters button-holed prospects. Capitalists stepped from its door to sidewalks of planks lost in mud, followed by men with more planks to ease their way across the river of mud that was Holmden

Street. Strains of sour music blared from free concert saloons; strumpets solicited from windows and doorways of dives.

Forty dollars a day! But the railroad crawled down the Creek to the Miller farm, the haul shortened to six miles, and Coon Frisbee, hauling for Sam van Syckle, fought with Sam over the price of a load. Drunk, Coon curled his blacksnake along the ground and made Sam dance. "Let'er out, Whiskers!" Coon cracked the whip. A scholarly thin-lipped man, Sam danced, but his side whiskers bristled with his rage and, dancing, Sam swore, "No damned drunken mule skinner will ever haul another barrel of oil for me!"

And it was Sam van Syckle who threw down the snakelike line of two-inch tubing from Pithole to the Miller farm. The teamsters hitched onto it, tore it up, dragged lengths of it afield. Sam armed guards who drove the teamsters back, and between bristling lines of shotguns the tubing went down. Three steam pumps, working day and night, performed the work of three hundred teams working ten hours a day. A man and his team were worth eight dollars a day when he could get it; leases were snapped up at twenty-five hundred dollars an acre and a fourth of the oil; it took seventy-five hundred dollars to put down a well. Christ!

But in the halls of the Patchen House, the Morey Hotel, the Bonta House were laughter and lace, perfume and ruffles, the rustle of silk trains. The Swordsmen's Club had brought their ladies overland for their promenade concert and ball, and hotel safes bulged with jewels in velvet cases. The great dining room at the Patchen House was cleared of tables and chairs, its floor covered with spotless canvas. The forty-piece band, the caterers, the coloratura soprano, and the masses of tuberose came from New York.

Overhead winter stars shone clear as horses strained into collars to haul hotel hacks through the three feet of mud and oil to the Patchen House. From the hacks, Swordsmen in white ties and tails, Inverness capes and silk hats, handed down their ladies in silks and furs and jewels to step under the canopy along red carpet between gaping lines of idle teamsters, sheep-

skin-coated drillers and tool dressers. There were the Bensons and McKelvys, the Archbolds and Vandergrifts, the McKinnys and Taylors and Satterfields. And there was Matt Dwyer; Matt Dwyer and Petty with young Jim Preston, his silk hat a tilt, his blond mustache rolling over his lip.

Petty walked between them along the carpet, the froth of lace ruffles spread around her. Her hair, caught high, was a cascade of shining curls. The velvet dolman hanging loose from slim shoulders revealed the slender throat, the off-shoulder bodice drawn tight over the swell of young firm breasts to taper to the tiny waist. Rand could have touched her as she passed. He could see the demure sweep of lashes against her cheek, lowered before the milling crowd's bemused stare. He caught the scent of violets.

Violets! The scent of them lingered in the haze closing in on him at the table in Cornell's Free Concert Saloon and Variety Show. It was Whisky Lou across the bottle of rotgut from him, her knee rubbing his under the table. Lou or Split Lip Johnson or Silver Heels . . . It was Lou. Her row of gold-capped teeth glinted in the haze. Around them was the stench of rotgut, tobacco smoke, sweating unwashed bodies, mud, and oil. Violets . . . Christ!

"Chase the Squirrel." The haze thinned around the edges. Across the sawdust-covered floor, the welter of tough-jawed, flannel-shirted men and dancing girls in bedraggled knee-length tarlatan and tarnished spangles, Rand saw One Eye Feeney at the piano, the butt of his cigar dangling from a corner of his mouth as his blunt fingers hammered the keys for drinks and loose change. Bones Aiken sawed the fiddle, his cadaverous face blue-shadowed in the lamplight. Baby Face Watson, his pink cheeks distended, pressed his button mouth against his horn.

Threading the tables, the swarm at the bar, was Ben Hogan, the bouncer, with his brass knuckles and slung shot, the oaken bludgeon; a squat bull-shouldered man with a bullet head and handle-bar mustache, eyes out for the tight-fisted buyers. In the dim reaches of the back room, poker chips rained down on

plank tables, roulette wheels whirled. French Kate, Hogan's girl with her Medusa head of black curls, dealt faro, and the Reverend in a frock coat, his face benign and his tongue smooth, made a pitch on a barrelhead and dealt three-card monte. Overhead by way of the flimsy stairs were the windowless partitioned-off cubicles with their dingy beds.

*"Said the driller to his toolie, 'Will you dance me a jig?'
'Yup, by God, if I tear down the rig!'
So he took down his fiddle and begun to scroll
As he danced a double shuffle round the three-inch hole."*

One Eye bawled it out at the piano, and with a whoop and a roar the crowd took it up as double-jointed Coon Frisbee, a full head of steam up, swung into a double shuffle in the center of the floor. Coon's legs and arms were a whirling windmill as swaying, bending, he fanned the sawdust with his battered oil-soaked hat; big-hole boots stomped to the rhythm; clapping hands kept time. "Let 'er out, Coon!"

*"Oh, the toolie he fiddled, and the driller he drilled.
Fiddlin' and drillin', their pockets they filled.
But one fine night they met a whore,
And they're back in the rig, a-drillin' some more!"*

The bottle was empty, and Hogan loomed in the haze. Lou said, "How long we gonna stand on one leg?" The haze closed in again. In it a girl with a cascade of shining curls danced the lancers among cloud-topped towers. Her voice achingly wistful, she said, "Rings and things are what I need." Then Matt Dwyer vaulted the table, and Tige wagged his tail feebly, the broken bone protruding through the flesh, while Ma sat in the light of the dying fire with the Holy Writ in her lap.

Rand leaned toward Lou. He caught Lou's sickish-sweet breath like rotting fruit, and the reek of rotgut. His eyes came to focus on Lou's bedizened sagging face, stony-eyed. He saw the deep bluish cleft between pendant flaccid breasts. He asked Lou, "What is thy duty toward thy neighbor?" Lou hiccuped.

A hollow cough ripped through her flat chest. She spat blood-flecked phlegm into the sawdust. She said, "Christ!"

The haze thinned again. In the center of the floor, Nettie Wallace and Irish Kit, two of Hogan's female pugilists, fought each other in black tights and sleeveless jerseys. "Take 'em off!" Coins rained around them in the sawdust until off came the tights and jerseys, and the fight went on to hoarse cheers, hilarious betting. Then Kit slipped through Nettie's guard with a left to the jaw, Nettie's head snapped back, her eyes glazed over, her knees sagged, she went down on her hands and knees, and rolled over in the sawdust among the coins. A knockout.

*"Walk right in, the gate's ajar,
Swing your partner to the bar!"*

Bones Aiken, sawing, called the set, and Rand's boots clumped in the sawdust, sweat streaked his face. He was dancing the lancers with a girl in white lace ruffles, but when he reached for her hand she vanished into cloud-topped towers, and it was Lou he swung; Lou or English Jennie or Split Lip.

He woke in the box stall with his team at Diefenbach's livery stable. His money belt was gone, his holster and pistol. Lou? English Jennie? Silver Heels? He couldn't remember. He remembered only the fetid airlessness of the partitioned-off cubicle, the smell of stale whisky and unwashed bodies, the sight of bedraggled tarlatan and tarnished spangles hanging from a spike in a plank wall, the feel of soft flaccid flesh.

He got to his hands and knees, to his feet, and clinging to the rack of bones that was his off horse, he was sick. His knees sagged under him, let him down. "Ma!" He was back in the attic against the chimney while the blast roared down from the hills, and in it was the thin, high howl of roaming wolf packs. But Ma was there. She looked young, even pretty. A strange peace was in her eyes, a strange softness to her tongue. Her hand on his forehead was gentle. Then Ma's voice faded, and it was Abby's voice he heard. Somebody shook him, jerked him to his feet. It was Captain Luke Jones. In the doorway of

the stall was Sam Spellacy with Abby in her shawl and rusty bonnet. Abby's eyes were red-rimmed.

"It's your ma." Abby dabbed at her eyes with a corner of her shawl. "S-sometime in th' n-night."

It was Ma. Ma was gone. Waking, Abby and Danny had found Ma's bed empty and, trailing her, they had found her along the Creek road, face down in the snow. Abby sobbed, "Something come over her in the night, seems like."

Abby and Melodia Spellacy laid Ma out on the bed in the lean-to, a spare figure in a dark red merino dress with a strange peace on her still features. Rand sat beside the bed, his face rigid, while the women came and went, whispering, and from outside came the sound of pounding hammers as Luke Jones and Sam Spellacy hammered the pine box together. They covered it with tarpaulin on the bed of Rand's wagon, behind the hairless, broken team, and on the wagon seat Rand picked up the reins.

"Gee, Bess," he said. "Gee, Mac."

Abby tapped Rand's cache in her stays afterward, but only for the marble slab in the Seceders' churchyard which said:

Sarah Bole
1824—1866
Faithful Wife
of
John Bole
1821—1861

Abby tapped her stays because oil had dropped to a dollar and a quarter a barrel. Million-dollar oil companies crashed to the wall. The sheriff took over thousands of acres, engines, boilers, tools. Wells showed signs of exhaustion, ceased flowing. The Danforth Hotel was knocked down at fifteen dollars for kindling wood. Banks, brothels, shops, and hotels were ripped apart, loaded on wagons. To hell with Pithole, the Magic City! And on to Petroleum Center!

Pithole wiped nineteen names from the roll of the Swordsmen's Club. None of them was Matt Dwyer. Petroleum Center

restored six of them and added two more. They were Captain Luke Jones and Coon Frisbee. The captain brought his lady from Beacon Hill in Boston to a fine house high on the bluff at Oil City, overlooking the river, and Abby Sloan woke to find herself a sixteenth owner in the Jones oil property at Petroleum Center in return for her load of coal. The dividends overflowed Abby's petticoat, her stays, and Abby bought an iron safe. She said, "That'll hold it, looks like, till he comes t' borrow it back."

Coon Frisbee started to build Frisbee's Folly on Main Street in Titusville, a spreading frame structure where—mark Coon's word, by Jesus!—Prince Edward of Wales would one day stick his feet under Coon's table. Coon's wife brought a teacher from New York and began to take elocution lessons. But Shamburg dropped eleven names from the roll of the Swordsmen's Club. None of them was Matt Dwyer. One of them was Coon Frisbee. Pleasantville dropped nine and added one. Sam Spellacy. Melodia and Sam and their growing brood moved to Main Street in Titusville.

It was at the Central House in Petroleum Center, with its three decks of verandas across the front, that the Swordsmen and their ladies in Paris gowns danced the lancers, the schottische, and *varsouvienne*. And within a stone's throw of it was Maggie Moore's house with twenty girls, a melodeon in the parlor, and carpet on the floor. Maggie's or Jim McKeown's Blue Ruin Shanty. Pay your money and take your choice. And then a pipeline went down.

Rand dressed tools for Butch Higgins at Petroleum Center. Butch, a good-natured, slow-moving hulk of a man, given to periodic sprees, wasn't much for it. He said to Sam Spellacy, "No damned Bole that ever lived was worth hell room!" But Sam said, "Give 'im a chance, Butch. That's all I ask." Rand kept a full head of steam up in the boiler for Butch and a red-hot forge. He swung a knowing hammer against the glowing bit, bringing it to gauge, and the muscles rippled along his arms and shoulders. He kept the engine greased and purring. He kept the rig neat as a pin and the small tools where Butch

could lay hands on them in the dark. He covered for Butch when Butch lay in sodden sleep on the lazy bench, his hand on the line while the tools churned in the hole.

"You ain't any chip off th' old block!" Butch said one day. "Your ma didn't open th' door on a likely peddler one night, did she?"

"No," Rand said evenly.

It was over the dog that he came to grips with Butch; a dun-colored, lop-eared dog that had followed him on the street. The dog slept on the foot of his bed at Ma Sweeney's boardinghouse. It lay curled against the warm forge in the rig, waking to dig for fleas with a hind paw and seek Rand out with caressing eyes. Finding Rand, the dog dropped back to sleep with a contented sigh, stretched full length. And then one day Butch tripped over him, and the dog, suddenly roused, nipped Butch in the right leg just above his boot. Enraged, Butch drew his boot back to hoist the dog clear of the rig, and Rand's right to his jaw caught him off balance. Butch measured his length on the derrick floor with a dull thud. He sat up. He shook his head in speechless fury to clear it and found his voice.

"You get that goddamned dog out of this rig," he roared, "or——"

"C'mon, Tige," Rand said, and together they shook the dust of the rig from their feet.

He drilled for Slim Trimble, one of Luke Jones's tool pushers. Slim wasn't much for it. He said, "You can't get blood out of a turnip." But Luke Jones said, "Give 'im a chance, Slim. That's all I ask."

"All right, what do you want?" Slim said to Rand.

"I'm a driller," Rand said, and Peg-leg, his grizzled toolie, bore him out on it. Stumping around the rig, the grease can in his hand, Peg-leg looked at Rand stripped to the waist on the driller's stool, his hand on the line.

"By God, you can make hole, boy!" There was respect in Peg-leg's voice. "You put 'em in the sand, son, and you sure got a build on you!"

But one day Rand heard the crack of a blacksnake and heard Greasy Forman, a teamster, roar, "Get in there, damn you!" He looked up to see Greasy's wagonload of coal mired in the mud. Greasy cracked the blacksnake again. It cut through the hide of his off horse and laid the flesh open. Rand stepped down from the driller's stool.

One leap took him over the wagon wheel. He caught Greasy by the collar and dragged him down off the wagon, wrested the blacksnake from him, and tossed it aside. It was man to man then, and they fought there in the mud beside the wagon with fist and boot, tooth and nail. They fought to a draw and until both of them, spent and bloody, leaned against the wagon to get their wind back. Then gathering himself together, Greasy said with such cold fury that it sounded almost amiable, "Now, damn you, I'm going to kill you, Bole!"

He came in with his bullet head down to butt Rand in the stomach, and Rand's boot caught him in the face. Greasy's ape arms clamped around Rand, pinning his arms to his sides. The stubs of Greasy's teeth came together on one of Rand's ears, but Rand brought a knee up. It caught Greasy in the belly, the breath went out of him, his jaws relaxed, and his knees went out from under him. He went down on all fours. He would have got to his feet again, but Rand was upon him, and he kicked Greasy until Greasy lay beaten, senseless.

"All right, you're through," Slim Trimble said to Rand. "I've got enough trouble with teamsters without having a Bole make more."

He drilled for one man after that, dressed tools for another, but he was the last man to be hired on a lease, the first to be let go. He was a Bole. All right, he was a Bole, and, by God, he'd be a Bole! While his money lasted he held forth at Jim McKeown's Blue Ruin Shanty, the bottle on the table between him and one strumpet or another, reciting passages from Shakespeare, paragraphs from Tom Paine, the Acts and the four Gospels, while the haze deepened around him. When his money was gone they threw him out, but it took two bouncers. Broke,

he slept in the hayloft over Fuller's livery and, come morning, he dunged out stalls for his lodging.

He was broke and twenty-one that summer as he leaned against a lamppost in front of the Crittendon House in Titusville, a strapping, bearded driller in hip boots and flannel shirt, his eyes cryptic, unflinching, hard. Titusville, the Queen City! The vigilantes had taken over, and church spires reached skyward. Main Street was a splendid cobblestoned avenue. Along its outer reaches graveled drives wound from between stone pillars under arching maples and porte-cocheres. Across the street a billboard in front of the Opera House announced coming events sponsored by the Men's Literary Club; a lecture by Mark Twain, a concert by Christine Nilssen. Another billboard advertised the repertoire of a stock company from New York: *East Lynne*, *The French Spy*, *Camille*, *Lucretia Borgia*, *The Octoroon*, *Our American Cousin*. Swordsmen in cutaways and wing collars turned into the Oil Exchange to sit back in tufted leather chairs in the lounge, watchful eyes through the door to the indicator on the wall above the bull ring as it registered the price of oil.

At Rand's elbow, Bull Webster, lease hound for Luke Jones, spat into the gutter. Bull had just pulled in from Bradford, where he'd leased up some acreage for Luke Jones.

"And there goes Jones!" Bull said. "He'll lose his shirt. Job Moses and Al Clark burned their fingers plenty there. Christ, they didn't get enough oil between 'em to grease a set of wagon wheels."

Bull spat again. He said, "Coon Frisbee's drilling up there on the Witkins farm."

"I thought Coon was broke," Rand said.

"Broke!" Bull chuckled. "He's broke flatter than a flicker's nest, but his wife's been taking in sewing. God knows how Coon talked her out of the money for his Long John engine!"

Bradford? Rand remembered Aunt Celestia, her whose husband had been in lumber, the ring with the blue set, the necklace to match. Sapphire. S-a-double-p-h-i-r-e. The clatter of hoofs on cobblestone drowned Bull's voice as down the avenue

pranced a spanking team of blooded bays. The sun caught the silver-mounted harness, the horses' shining coats, the high polish of the coachman's boots. In the victoria sat a girl in a flower-sprigged gown, white lace mitts. Tilted aslant the shining curls was a saucy pork-pie hat with follow-me-lad streamers, and the ruffled parasol fluttered in the breeze.

They met in front of the Crittendon House, the victoria and Jim Preston on his dancing stallion. Petty leaned forward; the coachman reined in; the stallion reared to his hind legs, came down. Jim Preston wore tight fawn-colored riding pants, sat his English saddle with casual ease. His hair waved smoothly back from his forehead; the clipped blond mustache rolled over his lip. Rand caught the scent of Macassar oil and violets mingled with the smell of leather and harness oil.

Petty wanted to send a message to Susan, Jim's sister. Jim was pleased to tell Susan that Petty would be unable to attend Susan's euchre party on Wednesday afternoon. She was leaving with Papa to visit Aunt Celestia in Bradford. How long would she be gone? Jim leaned forward in the saddle. Petty sighed; her eyelashes swept her cheek. It would be hard to say, and such a dreadful place, Bradford!

"But Papa has charge of Auntie's temporal affairs, you know." Petty's voice was sweetly childlike, breathless. "And, poor dear, he can't bear to have me out of his sight."

Bradford? Dwyer in Bradford? Dwyer and Jones? Rand watched the flutter of lashes, the flirt of the parasol; and, watching, he remembered the cache still sewed in Abby's stays where no slut had laid hand on it.

9

SO THIS WAS BRADFORD! AND IT WAS ON A BANK OF Tuna Creek that he met Murphy; in the livery stable behind the Bannon House. A bandy-legged little man with a fringe of reddish hair framing his bald spot and the beard to match dipping under his chin to frame the ruddy face with the map of Ireland on it, Murphy was at Rand's service. He took instant charge of the team and buckboard. He brought a bucket of water and a sponge to sponge off the tired team. It was his gravity that set Murphy apart, and the childlike guilelessness of his eyes.

Put up at the Bannon House? Murphy dipped his sponge in the bucket. And why not, man? The house was Rand's till spring freshet, when the loggers and rafters swarmed from afar to the banks of old Tuna. If a man lacked aught to eat and drink at the Bannon House in low-water time, 'twas but fault of his own. Rand would find Mike Bannon, the proprietor, behind the bar. One of a kind, Mike was, and liquor to match Mike's was not to be found for miles around.

"And his word as good as his bond, man!" Murphy said.

Rand picked up his satchel, and wringing the sponge, Murphy looked him over: a young buck with the shoulders of an ox, muscles like the springs of a bear trap, and in dude's rig: wing collar, silken cravat, felt hat jauntily aslant a crisp growth of sandy hair.

"And if it's a dark-eyed lass, name o' Molly, yez lay eye on behind a closed door," Murphy said, "yez c'n buss her for me, if yez will."

The Bannon House, eh? It was a barnlike frame building,

weather-beaten. Rand opened the door and stepped into the bar: a dim dank room, its floor covered with sawdust. Hanging by four chains from one of the rough-hewn crossbeams was a glass lamp. And behind the long bar across one end was mine host, Mike Bannon.

A robust son of Erin, collarless, and with his shirt sleeves rolled high. His snow-white hair stood up in close-clipped bristles. His eyebrows were coal-black, and from beneath them peered the opaque eyes of a man for the main chance. He set the bottle and glass down on the bar before Rand, and Rand poured the drink. He downed it neat and, blinking, looked at Mike. Mike batted not so much as an eyelash. Ah, well!

Rand tossed a casually crumpled hundred-dollar bill from his waistcoat pocket across the bar. It was one of the remaining two. "A fool and his money's soon parted," Abby had said, "but you're a man grown." Mike fished a roll of bills from his pants pocket, peeled off nine tens and nine ones without denting the roll perceptibly. He added Rand's bill to the roll, shoved it back into his pocket without a word. Beguiled, Rand leaned one elbow on the bar, rested one foot on the rail, and shoved the felt hat back on his head.

"My dear Mr. Bannon!" he said. "We are well met. You see before you a humble timber scout, forerunner of Philadelphia capital, and plenty of it, man! I shall be in your fair city for some little time, and I am of a mind to make the Bannon House my headquarters."

"Timber, eh?" There was a purr in Mike's voice, a thoughtful gleam lit his eyes, but Rand picked up his satchel.

"Ah yes, timber!" he purred. "And now, if you please, I would retire to my room."

"Molly!" Mike's roar resounded to the rafters without a perceptible move of facial muscles. Rand heard a light step and looked up to see a slim girl in a door that led to a hall. She held a pitcher of water in one hand, and in the other a wire hoop from which keys dangled. The full gray calico skirt stood out from the small waist. From the waist a tight basque buttoned close to her throat. Blue-black hair, parted in the middle, hugged

the small head to form the chignon at the back. Fine dark eyebrows brought out the creamy pallor of Irish skin. Rand caught a fleeting glimpse of a neatly turned ankle as he followed her up the stairs.

The stair steps, the floor of the hall were potted with the spikes of rafters' boots. Molly unlocked a door, preceded him into the room. She set the full pitcher down to throw a window wide. A sudden breeze from the window blew the door shut behind Rand, and while the girl poured water from her pitcher to the pitcher in the bowl on the commode he leaned idly against the door, surveying the room. It was clean! Clean as a pin. There was a white counterpane on the bed! His eyes came back to the girl, and his jaw dropped. Leaning idly against the door, he looked along the barrel of a pistol into a pair of steady dark eyes!

"I am Molly Bannon." She could have been passing the time of day. "Open the door, if you please."

Rand drew himself up to his full height. He threw the door wide. His bow was low and courtly. The felt hat swept the potted floor. He said, "Madam, you have met a man of honor! A timber scout, perhaps, but one to whom chivalry is not unknown." His eyes, holding hers, were grave, level. He saw the dark eyes widen, waver, and drop. So they were blue! A deep, dark blue. Scarlet stained her cheeks as she slipped the pistol into a pocket in the folds of her skirt, picked up her pitcher and keys. Dark lashes swept her cheek as Rand closed the door behind her. That Irish bastard out there in the barn! A dark-eyed lass, name o' Molly, eh? And buss the wench for Murphy, if yez want to die young!

Through the window came the scream of saws from the mills along the creek, the ring of axes in the hills, now and again a moaning sigh as a giant pine toppled to crash. Down the sides of the hills ran the skidways along which logs skidded to swollen mountain streams, come spring freshet, to swirl along the streams to the mouth of Tuna Creek, where the loggers and rafters boarded them for the journey down Tuna to the Allegheny, and down the Allegheny to the Pittsburgh market.

In the valley the plow had followed the ax. Bradford was a huddle of weather-beaten frame buildings: a general store, a blacksmith shop, a white-steepled Baptist church. From the window Rand could see a sign which read, "Doctor Ephraim Olds, Physician, Shoemaker, and Tanner." A sign swinging from a maple tree in a front yard said, "George Berry, Attorney at Law and Notary Public." Boardwalks bordered Main Street on either side. A hound-dog drowsed in the sun on the porch of the store, and at the hitching rail waited a lone team and wagon.

But somewhere on one of the outlying farms Coon Frisbee stood on a driller's stool, one hand on a temper screw. Rand found him next morning. Led on by the faltering chug of Coon's Long John engine mingled with the scream of saws and echoing ring of axes, he saw Coon's derrick outlined against the sky and not a hound's jump from the road in a field of ripening buckwheat. That was Coon on the driller's stool, his hand on the temper screw, stripped to the waist, his butternut jeans tucked into big-hole boots.

"Let 'er out, Coon!" Rand vaulted the derrick floor, and Coon's eyes lit up. Rand sawed at an imaginary fiddle; Coon jumped from the stool to swing into a double shuffle around the hole, swaying and bending as Rand's voice rang out:

*"Said the driller to his toolie, 'Will you dance me a jig?'
'Yup, by God, if I tear down the rig!'"*

Prince Edward of Wales had his feet all but under Coon's table again. Coon said it was oil, hell, or China, but he was on the belt, by God, if any of 'em were! From the looks of things, the belt ran along Tuna Creek, east by north. But eying Rand's waiting team and buckboard, the wing collar and silken cravat, Coon said he'd eat any acreage Rand leased between him and hell.

"The chips're down, son!" Coon said. "And the big ones're in. The big ones and Coon Frisbee."

And Rand might better have taken Coon's word for it. He

grasped the horny hands of farmers in a warm, hearty grip. He listened, enthralled, to their wives' symptoms with the baby on his lap; and for his pains he heard the names of Benson, McKelvy, McKinney. Driven back into the hills to ride horseback along the vine-tangled logways of the timber haulers, he heard Taylor, Satterfield, Jones, and Spellacy. Between Coon and hell there wasn't a loose chip.

In Rand's waistcoat pocket, besides the casually crumpled hundred-dollar bill, was a paragraph torn from the weekly *Bradford Era*. It was about a visitor to Bradford from Titusville. In the cool, high-ceilinged parlors of the frame houses on Congress Street the ladies of the first timber families met to sew for missionary barrels or to study the Delsarte system, a combination of singing and declamation, rhythmic gymnastics and dancing. Petty Dwyer met with them.

"She is distinguished for her elegant and recherché toilettes," said the *Era*. "Judging from appearances, her purse must be backed by gold mines. She has displayed two new costumes every day since her arrival, and they are every one beautiful and stylish. It is well seen she has a genius for dress, the great gift of taste, and a talent for display. A winsome blonde, she enhances the fragrance of pure womanhood by putting all her heart and mind and soul to the devising of chefs-d'oeuvre in dress with ravishing effect."

Rand's face was impassive as he turned into the bar at the Bannon House. There was a little man behind the bar with a reddish fringe. . . . It was Murphy! Mine host? Mike Bannon was abed, laid low by the periodic attack of a chronic ailment. And the ailment? The kind for which there was but one cure. The cure? Two quarts or three in a brown jug beside the bed, and when the jug was empty, psst! the ailment had eased.

"Not his own whisky!" Rand eyed Murphy.

"'Tis only medicinal whisky Mike drinks." Murphy was gravely reproachful. "Outside o' that, he's a temperance man."

"Murphy," Rand said, "I would have the truth from you and only the truth. How much of Mike Bannon's whisky must a man drink before his purse is backed by gold mines?"

"Gold mines, he says!" Murphy weighed it gravely. "Pssst, lad! A man would have but to pass a hand over the bottle."

Murphy set the bottle and two glasses on the bar between them. He rubbed his thumb against his fingers until Rand tossed a bill across the bar. Murphy poured—three fingers in two water glasses—and they drank to the recovery of Mike Bannon, whose word was as good as his bond. But the bond?

They drank to the bond. Murphy cleared his throat. Ah, well, 'twas a sad story about Mike. As a young buck in the old country—and a fine broth of a lad!—he had been a coachman to a family of gentry on the banks of the Lennon. Rand looked at Murphy. Murphy looked at Rand. They drank to the River Lennon.

But all in due time there had flowered in Mike's manly bosom a tender regard for a young daughter of the house, and his regard was returned. 'Twas a runaway marriage, and the gentry, disgraced, had settled the girl's dot upon them and packed the pair off to America. They drank, Rand and Murphy, to the triumph of true love, and then it was Rand's turn. He drew himself up to his full height. One hand inside his coat, he looked Murphy straight in the eye.

"Murphy," he said, "you see before you the bastard son of the Duke of Aosta!"

"My respects to yez, bastard!" Murphy raised his glass, and they drank to the Duke of Aosta.

It was Murphy's turn. Well, then, the fair bride had languished on the banks of Tuna Creek, and with longing for the banks of the Lennon. She had died of it, and to Mike was left only the slip of a daughter in her image.

"And the dot?"

"And the dot!"

They drank to the dot. But 'twas a trifle, the dot. The slip of a girl on the banks of the Tuna became the last of the gentry on the banks of the Lennon, and not a fortnight since, a bar-rister had come from across the water.

"And 'tis whispered," Murphy said, "he brought money."

"From the banks of the Lennon?"

"To the banks of the Tuna!"

They drank to the Lennon. They drank to the Tuna and to the barrister. Then Rand leaned his folded arms on the bar. Murphy leaned his folded arms on the bar. Their noses all but touched as they looked each other in the eye.

"Murphy," Rand said, "I would have the truth from you and only the truth. This slip of a daughter, now. This heiress to the wealth of old Erin! This daughter of Irish gentry! Murphy, the truth. . . . How good is she with that pistol?"

"How good, man?" Murphy scratched his head. "'Twould be my idea of it, lad, that the man doesn't live who knows!"

The door of the bar opened, and under Rand's eyes Murphy stiffened and stood straight while over him swept swift decorum, and a quick whisk of his hand left only one glass on the bar.

"Good day to you, sir!" Could that be Murphy? "And what can I do for yez this day?"

"I think this is the gentleman I want to see, Murphy." The voice was at Rand's elbow. He turned to see a slender man with studious eyes behind steel-rimmed spectacles. The man said, "I am George Berry, the attorney here." Rand looked at Murphy. A barrister! Murphy covered his eyes with one hand, detached. The barrister went on, and with talk of money, but money for the barrister.

It was well seen this tract of timber the barrister would sell was a bargain because Ed Bingham had stripped a two-thousand-acre tract next to it of more than fifty thousand dollars' worth of timber. In fact, Bingham was still hanging onto his tract for oil. He had put a price of a quarter of a million dollars on it!

Rand looked at Murphy. He said, "Murphy, bow to your master!" But Murphy had begun to polish glasses with a towel, preoccupied with his task. The barrister talked on.

The barrister's client, however, would have to sell or let the tract go as unseated land to tax sale. The barrister had had one offer for the tract; from a man from Oil Creek, Matt Dwyer, brother of Sydney Dwyer of Bradford, deceased. He was a timber man, Dwyer, but a close man in a deal, and the barrister

was interested, of course, in getting as much for his client as—

Rand had stiffened. He stood free of the bar under his own power, drawn up to his full height. He took the casually crumpled hundred-dollar bill from his waistcoat pocket, flipped it along the bar to the barrister's map. His voice seemed to come from a distance. It was warm and receptive. He would be glad to inspect this timber, but it would take time. He would have to confer with his principals in Philadelphia.

"But I take you for a man of honor, sir!" His voice deepened. "And on your word alone, I'll lay a hundred dollars for a sixty-day option, sight unseen."

He woke next morning to find the bill gone from his pocket. In its place was a piece from the *Bradford Era* about missionary barrels, the Delsarte system, a fair visitor; that and a slip of paper giving him a sixty-day option to purchase seven thousand acres of land on Music Mountain at four dollars an acre. It was signed by one George Berry, agent, and it bore a notary's seal.

He sought Murphy out and found him still doubling behind the bar, not a shade less ruddy. Murphy examined the legal document and turned even graver. He shook his head. 'Twas many a man had never known his own strength till he'd sipped of Mike Bannon's liquor, but Rand was the first man to grab a mountain by the tail, sight unseen.

"Bannon, eh?" Rand's eyes narrowed. "Bannon and Berry!"

"Nay, lad!" Murphy was positive but puzzled. His arms folded on the bar, Murphy furrowed his brow, thinking. Mike Bannon was a man for a quick deal here and there, to be sure, and where was the man who wasn't? But the barrister, now, was a scholar and gentleman, a temperance man to boot. The barrister and Mike Bannon had never been, so to speak, intimate. Murphy shook his head. 'Twas beyond him!

"But near as I recollect it, lad," Murphy combed his brain, "there was talk of a man from Oil Creek—name o' Dwyer—brother o' Sydney, deceased."

10

MURPHY HAD THE TEAM ALREADY HITCHED TO THE buckboard. The horses' coats shone; the harness gleamed black. The buckboard, newly washed, glistened. Rand stood looking at the shining patent-leather dashboard, the red wheels.

"A job, man!" Conceding it, he crossed Murphy's ready palm with silver. "But yez owed it to me, Murphy. I bussed a dark-eyed lass, name o' Molly, behind a closed door for yez, didn't I?"

"If so, I'm obliged to yez," Murphy conceded. "'Tis a thing a man hesitates t' do f'r himself, now."

Murphy stood away from the horses' heads to look Rand over there in the buckboard with the reins and whip in his hands; from the tan felt hat with the rolling brim and black ribbon band to the white linen collar rolling over the silk cravat, the snowy piping of the waistcoat, the one-button sack coat and yellow chamois gloves, the gray-striped trousers and burnished congress gaiters.

"Yez've caught th' flirt of a petticoat somewheres," Murphy decided.

"Murphy!" Rand looked him straight in the eye. "I'll have yez to know that you look upon a man of honor about to dine with a man from Oil Creek, name of Dwyer and brother of Sydney, deceased."

Murphy stood a minute, pondering, with his tongue in his cheek.

"And it's thinkin' of yez I'll be this night while waltzin' with th' Good Queen herself," Murphy said. "And yez're still shoppin' f'r mountains, I take it?"

"No, Murphy." Rand furrowed his forehead. "My friend, Dwyer, is blameless. A paltry hundred? He wouldn't sully his hands with it, man! No—a purely social event, and low as your station in life is, Murphy, I say good night to yez. Get up, Bess. Come on, Mac."

The screaming saws along Tuna Creek were still for the night, the axes in the hills. There was only the clip of the horses' hoofs in the dust of Main Street, the whisper of the breeze in swaying pines and the leaves of maples overhead. In Rand's waistcoat pocket was the piece from the Bradford *Era*, cheek by jowl with the remembrance of one George Berry, scholar and gentleman, and a violet-scented note. The note said in fine girlish script:

DEAR RAND,

A little bird tells me an old playmate of mine on the Creek is here. Can you come to dinner? It's a white house with an iron fence. I have some new piano music. Tonight at seven. There is a fountain with two stone deer beside it, and it's on Congress Street.

PLEASANCE DWYER

Rand's face softened with the thought of it. He whistled through his teeth as the team swung left into Congress Street between boardwalks, past white frame houses set back in shaded lawns with lamplight shining through long windows across wide verandas. He stopped whistling and sang to himself, improvising:

*"'Will you step into my parlor?' said the spider to the fly.
And said the fly to the spider, 'You bet I will . . . but why?'"*

He came to the iron fence, the stone deer beside the fountain, and turned into a graveled drive that wound from between stone pillars to the arching porte-cochere.

The wide hall, the curving stairway with its lustrous mahogany banister were softly carpeted. On the newel post a bronze Apollo held aloft a lamp with a fringed shade of silk. The maid

said, "Miss Pleasance is dressing, but Mr. Dwyer and Mrs. Sydney Dwyer are waiting."

In the cool high-ceilinged front parlor Matt Dwyer rose from his chair. His mustache and imperial were gray, and his spectacles dangled from a black silk ribbon. His handshake was hearty, his voice casually affable. He said, "Celestia, this is Rand Bole from the Creek."

Aunt Ettie! The part in her brown hair showed a quarter inch of white at the roots. Her face was florid, and her breath came shallowly from tightly laced stays under the straining whaleboned bodice. Her plump upper arms curved sharply into slim wrists, small hands. The feet on the footstool, tightly encased, were precarious support for her body, and the thin-lipped line of her mouth was at odds with her arch effusiveness. She said, "Oh, do take the blue damask chair, Mr. Bole. I call it my big-man chair."

The black marble mantel was gray-veined under the ceiling-tall mirror in its carved frame. On the mantel ticked a gilt cathedral clock. Tall crystal lamps, shaded with silk and fringe, were reflected in carved walnut. Matt Dwyer swung his spectacles idly from the cord as his eyes slid over Rand. He cleared his throat.

"George Berry told me you were here, Bole," he said. "I happened to mention it to Petty." He chuckled. "And beaux are at a premium here. In fact, you could name your own price. If you can waltz, that is."

"But I can't waltz"—Rand was affable too—"so I'll shade the price."

He kept an ear alert to a step on the stairway, covertly surveying the parlor, while Dwyer made small talk and Aunt Ettie twittered. The Brussels carpet was green. There was a large ottoman with woolen fringe. There were lace curtains heavily overdaped with green plush. Even the marble mantelshef had its hanging drapery embroidered with beads. There was a whatnot in the corner. On it were a basket of wax fruit under glass, a vase of wood covered with gilded reeds and filled with

grasses with gilded stems. The grasses were tied with a ribbon bow. There was a gilded dish in the shape of a hand, a daguerreotype in a plush case, and—

He heard the light step on the stairs, the rustle of petticoats, the scent of violets, and Petty stood poised in the doorway. Parted in the middle and drawn high and close, her hair fell in shining finger curls. The filmy white polonaise was square-necked, revealing the high swell of young breasts, the slender throat. Down its front was a row of blue ribbon bowknots. Petty's eyes flew wide.

"Rand!" Breathless, she held out both hands. "Is it you?"

"It's me," Rand said, but with her hands in his he doubted it.

Could this be Rand Bole? And could that be Petty across the table from him with the candlelight caught in her hair? Her voice was childlike, breathless. She said, "Can you waltz, Rand? Can you do the *varsouvienne*?" Rand's head swam. He heard himself say, "I'm sorry."

Petty's mouth took a downward twist, but Matt Dwyer said, "Can't you teach the young man to dance, my dear?"

"And down home I danced every night!" Petty's eyes were stark.

"'Down home!'" Aunt Ettie smiled, thin-lipped. "Down home we have dress balls and music from New York. Down home we dress for the theater. And down home there is Jim Preston, as I remember it."

Rand's eyes clung to Petty's face. He saw the blue eyes flash, and Petty said, "I loathe Jim Preston! He's a hateful, horrid flirt." He felt suddenly lighter than air. He was floating in space.

"While the cat's away the mice will play, my dear." Aunt Ettie smiled.

"Papa!" Petty's eyes, bright with quick tears, implored him. "Auntie persists in—"

Matt Dwyer cleared his throat and turned to Rand. He said, chuckling, "You've seen Coon Frisbee?"

"Coon Frisbee!" Petty was ahead of Rand, and her laugh

bubbled up from her toes. "Rand, if you could have heard his wife recite!" Petty laid a white hand over her heart, fixed Rand with a pensive gaze as she recited in dolorous accents:

"Break! Break! Break!

At the foot of thy crags, O sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

Will never come back to me."

Aunt Ettie shuddered. She said, "My dear, where would you come in contact with such people—unless in oil?"

"And timber, dearest!" Smiling sweetly, Petty let her eyes rest on the part in Aunt Ettie's hair, and the corners of Rand's mouth twitched. She picked up her cup, held it with her little finger crooked in exaggerated delicacy as she fluttered her lashes across it to Aunt Ettie. "But not in the first families of Tuna Valley, of course!"

Rand swallowed his food hastily, and Matt Dwyer cleared his throat again.

"Frisbee's down to fourteen hundred feet and still drilling!" Dwyer's chuckle was indulgent. He said some of the farmers round about had caught the fever and jigged down wells here and there, but they'd got dry holes and lame backs. Job Moses and Al Clark had got a little showing of oil. "About enough to grease a set of wagon wheels," Dwyer said. A few of the operators from the Creek had leased a tract here and there as a matter of practice, but it was expensive practice.

"The farmers," Dwyer said, "want too much, and it doesn't look good to me. I'm staying out, myself."

Rand heard him only dimly. Across the table Petty smiled. She said, "I'll teach you to waltz, Rand."

The music room was across the hall. The tall shaded lamp stood on a fringed scarf draped over a rosewood piano. Above the mantel was another tall mirror, and in it Petty was a framed picture on the piano stool with her skirt, looped twice in the back, falling around her in a lacy mist. Her slim fingers struggled with a quadrille reel, and Rand bent close to turn the page, but the piece had too many sharps, and Petty's favorite was

a waltz and *varsovienne*. It was "The Bells of Corneville" by Strauss.

Petty jumped up, caught her skirts up to her ankles. She hummed the tune as she showed Rand the waltz step.

"One-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three," Petty hummed, whirling with a rustle of petticoats and a flash of blue bowknots on her slippers.

Then one soft hand was in Rand's, the other on his shoulder. The tiny waist was within the circle of his arm; the scent of violets was in his nostrils as they waltzed, whirling, and he felt a wild, sweet surge of blood in his veins. Petty patted his cheek as she said, breathless, "Rand, you are perfect!" And they danced the schottische and polka and galop until Matt Dwyer stood in the doorway, his watch in his hand. He pinched Petty's flushed cheek.

"Early to bed and early to rise," he said, "makes pink cheeks and bright eyes."

She stood on the third step of the curving stairway, and it brought the shining head level with her father's. One hand on either of his shoulders, she kissed him lightly on either cheek. Over his shoulder her eyes went to Aunt Ettie's knitting needles flashing under the light of a parlor lamp. Her arms went around her father's neck, tightening, and her cheek pressed against his.

"Dear Papa!" she murmured. "And every bit Petty's, aren't you?"

Halfway up the stairs, she remembered and turned. Laughing and breathless, she leaned over the banister with the finger curls falling against her cheek. She pressed two fingers and the thumb of her right hand to pursed lips, stamped them into the palm of her left hand, and blew across the palm to Rand. The blood rushed to his head, roared in his ears. Through the roar he heard the bubbling laughter, the swish of skirts, and the sound of a door closing.

Dwyer walked out onto the veranda with him. There was the light from the long windows, the glow of Dwyer's cigar, and the moonlight sifting through tree branches. In it the stone deer gleamed white beside the fountain.

"So you let George Berry take you for a round hundred!" Matt Dwyer chuckled. "Told you Ed Bingham is holding the next tract for a cool quarter of a million, did he?"

On the breeze came the scent of pine. Over the valley was a brooding hush. *One-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three.* The beat was in Rand's blood, still surging with a heady warmth. He heard Dwyer's voice as from a distance. What had Dwyer said?

"More or less," Rand answered on a chance.

"I thought so!" Dwyer chuckled. "Well—it happens to the best of us. At that, there's a fair stand of timber on the tract."

Rand saw the flashing arc as Dwyer tossed his cigar over the porch railing, and then he saw only bright finger curls against a flushed cheek. *One-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three.*

"The price of lumber is down," Dwyer said, dubious. "Of course I've got connections in timber, and if a man wanted to hold on long enough he might come out at four dollars an acre."

One-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three. Rand ran his hands into his pockets. They closed over small change. There was that. There were the clothes on his back, the team and buckboard. Sapphire. S-a-double-p-h-i-r-e. His blood slowly cooled as Dwyer talked. Hold on? The beat was gone. Who in the devil had delivered him, wrapped and sealed, to George Berry?

"We might even make a little money eventually," Dwyer said. "I hate to see you stuck. Lumber should go up before too long. I'll tell you what I'll do, Bole! If you want to let me take your option over I'll take it up and see what I can do."

Rand stood suddenly rigid, like a setter on point. Words lurched through his head. "Will you—step into—my parlor?" He was back on the Creek, standing at the top of the lane with Ma and Pa and Tige while Matt Dwyer galloped up on his spent stallion and Simon's bells faded into the distance. He heard Tige's growl. He heard Dwyer say, "A word with you, Bole."

"We might just take the wind out of George Berry's sails

this time." Dwyer chuckled. "Let him know he's dealing with a couple timber men, eh?"

Rand barely breathed. The stone deer were gone beside the fountain. In their place he saw Coon Frisbee on the driller's stool in the moonlight, his hand on the temper screw. He heard Coon say, "It's oil, hell, or China!" His mouth went dry.

"We won't get rich," Dwyer weighed it. "Not at four dollars an acre, man! And you from timber country!" Dwyer shook his head, chuckling. "But we might break a little better than even—in time."

Sapphire. S-a-double-p-h-i-r-e. The beat was in Rand's blood again, the scent of violets in his nostrils, and the blood surged through his veins, wild and sweet. *One-two-three, one-two-three.* His knees went weak under him and, leaning against the porch rail, he looked at Dwyer standing idly there and swinging his pince-nez on the ribbon.

"Let you take my option over?" His voice was jovial. It gave Dwyer a man-to-man poke in the ribs. He drew on the chamois gloves. "My option? Not by a damned sight, Dwyer! You remember me, don't you? Rand Bole is my name. *Rand Bole from the Creek!*"

*"Oh, the toolie, he fiddled and the driller, he drilled!
Fiddlin' and drillin', their pockets they filled."*

COON FRISBEE SANG IT AS THE GREEN JET SHOT HIGH over the derrick. He roared it, jigging while the column of oil broke at the top to rain down on him. Swaying, bending, wild-eyed, he rubbed the green rain into his hair, into his beard, over his hairy torso. A whirling streak of oil-soaked jeans and boots, he went into a double somersault and landed on his feet. Little old Coon had come back, by God! He was in again. Bring 'em on! Let 'em come!

They came on foot and on horseback to the rumble of buckboard and wagon wheels, the swish of blacksnakes. They clung to the roof of the Erie's one worm-eaten coach; driller and toolie, craftsman and promoter, gambler and harlot and pimp. They overflowed the Bannon House and spread out into haylofts, tents, and shanties along Main Street. Along the rail at Mike Bannon's bar, big-hole boot jostled the spiked boot of lumberjack, and bad blood boiled over between "down-homer" and "barkpeeler." Bottles flew through the air, fists thudded on flesh, thumbs gouged at eyes. Mike Bannon installed a steel hood over his shelves of bottles and glasses. He armed himself and Murphy with the sawed-off butts of billiard cues, loaded. He made change from a brimming dishpan on the bar.

Summoned from his bed, George Berry, with his nightshirt stuffed into his trousers, sat at a table in a smoke-filled room, making out leases as the big ones fed the dubious edges of tracts

out to a pushing line of hoarse-voiced men waving bills and drafts. Acres were halved, sublet; halved and sublet again, while the vast heart of likely tracts stayed in the veteran hands of Taylor and Satterfield, Benson and McKelvy, Jones and Spellacy, McKinney. It was the game!

With the light of madness in his eyes, Rand cut Luke Jones out of the shoving horde around him and talked fast, his mouth dry. Seven thousand acres on Music Mountain only twelve miles away, south by west. A virgin stand of timber on it. And all for twenty-eight thousand dollars and an eighth of the oil! Luke Jones glanced hurriedly at Rand's map. South by west? His one eyebrow went up. He handed the map back, and the cool, unwavering eyes took Rand in.

"My name is Jones," he said. "Luke Jones from the Creek. Remember me?"

"Dwyer's made me an offer." Rand hung on. Jones took the map back, glanced at it again, handed it back. He said, "Dwyer's a timber man, isn't he? Let him have it, man!"

"Ed Bingham's holding the next tract at a quarter of a million." Beads of sweat stood out on Rand's forehead.

"Having any trouble holding it, is he?" Jones inquired.

Spellacy. Sam Spellacy. The canny Irish eyes ran hurriedly over Rand's map in the haze of smoke. Sam handed the map back, chuckling. South by west? He said, "Spellacy is the name, son. Sam Spellacy from the Creek."

Dwyer? Sam let one eyelid droop as he said, "Sic 'im, Rand!" Ed Bingham. Sam said, "And he'll be holding it when hell freezes over!"

Taylor, Satterfield, Benson, McKelvy. Not today, son, and not tomorrow. Dwyer? Let the so-and-so have it! Bingham? You don't say now! Rand buttonholed promoters in the halls and in the barrooms; dapper, unctuous men with open faces, opaque eyes, and smooth tongues. Twenty-eight thousand? And with the surfeit of suckers to be had for a town lot with a derrick on it? What would Rand take for his room? Christ, where could a man find a bed in this hell-hole?

Driven back, Rand wormed his way through the jostling

crowd at the bar and caught Mike Bannon's eye. Mike sopped the bar with a murky rag, one eye on Murphy and the dishpan, one eye on the map. Timber? On the Folsom tract?

"You're damned right!" The eyes for the main chance came back to Rand. "Know th' price o' lumber?"

Sweat stood out on Rand's forehead. Words rolled from his tongue with the eloquence of desperate urgency. Lumber would go up, and the timber would be so much to the good. They'd cut the heart out of the tract for the timber and on the long chance of oil. They'd let the suckers have the edges to drill and maybe prove the heart up. Christ, how could they lose? It was gilt-edged! Mike's eyes came back from the dishpan to take Rand's measure from under the black brows, knowing. Gilt-edged, but it had sifted down from upstairs, hadn't it? Mopping, Mike said to the man next to Rand, "What's yours?"

The snap of frost was in the air. The maples arching Main Street turned red and gold. Derricks sprang from the ground along Tuna Creek like mushrooms. Blacksnakes cracked and teams strained into collars to haul tools, engines, boilers, and cables. Mingled with the ring of axes, the sighing moan of felled pines, was the creak of walking beams, the chug of engines, the clang of sledges on hot bits. The valley echoed and re-echoed to the shouts of driller and tool dresser, the curses of teamsters. There were the puffs of white steam, twinkling derrick lanterns, the glow of forges.

Main Street blazed at night with the lights of gambling dens, free-and-easies. Bands blared in front of barnlike theaters, and barkers touted variety shows inside. Across the bridge on Pig Island, strumpets leaned from flimsy balconies, gestured from windows and doorways of Em Fenton's Old Glory Dance House, Maggie Moore's House, Bully Tom Quirk's New Idea Concert Hall, the Temple of Fashion. Boardinghouses took shape like rabbits out of a hat, and hotels were going up. Hotel La Pierre was to have gaslight and steam heat. Its maître d'hôtel was to be Jacques Bedour, a dapper caterer from New York with black waxed mustaches and clipped goatee. Hotel La

Pierre was to house the Oil Exchange and the Swordsmen's Club.

And still they came! Only dogged now, Rand leaned against the Erie station as the train pulled in. Ben Hogan got off with a new string of strumpets. There was the Reverend; the Reverend, Hank Johnson, Awful Ab Harrison, monte throwers. Belle Palmer, who dealt faro with her gun beside her. Jim Preston! He wore a tan felt hat with a rolling brim and black ribbon band, tan spats, and swung a jaunty walking stick. Rand caught the scent of Macassar oil. His eyes followed Preston until somebody clapped him on the back, and he turned to see Willie Maguire: Willie in broad-checked trousers and vest, cutaway coat and silk hat. Willie with his plump pink face and little mischievous eyes. Willie swinging his cane!

Rand fell upon Willie. He carried Willie's satchel to the buckboard. Willie was a sight for sore eyes. Willie was beer and skittles, an oasis in a desert. A room for Willie? What did Willie mean? Rand's voice reproved Willie. Who should share Rand's room if not the friend of his boyhood from the Creek? He gave Willie the chair in his room. He beamed happily at Willie, and Willie beamed happily back.

"Rand, you ain't got a—" Willie began, but Rand was spreading a map across Willie's round knees, and mesmerizing words flowed from Rand's mouth as he walked up and down the room, his hands in his pockets. There were fast horses in the words, diamond scarfpins and cuff buttons, fine food and wines, beautiful women. Willie sat charmed as a bird by a snake. His mischievous little eyes bulged in his head as they followed Rand up and down the room.

"I knew you'd show up sooner or later," Rand said, "and that's why I waited. I tell you, Willie, you've sat right down in a butter tub!"

Why, Dwyer had made Rand an offer! Yes, Dwyer, by God! Rand's eyes took fire. He said, "And I'll see him in hell first!" Ed Bingham had taken more than fifty thousand dollars' worth of timber off two thousand acres next to this tract, and Bingham was holding it for a quarter of a million dollars! Here

was the opportunity of a lifetime, and it was Willie's! Willie was in on the ground floor.

"And for twenty-eight thousand dollars and an eighth of the oil!" Rand's voice begged Willie to believe in his luck.

Willie's fat foolish face lengthened out. He flipped the pockets of the broad-checked trousers inside out. They were empty as a last year's bird nest. Willie's eyes brightened for a minute in merry reminiscence, turned sad. He said one word. He said, "Wimmen!" And as Rand stopped in his tracks Willie said hopefully, "Rand, you ain't got a loose ten-spot, have you?" His father? Patrick? Well, Patrick had taken a flier in Wall Street.

"We got a new cow." Willie brightened. "Name o' Daisy."

Christ! Willie slept in Rand's bed, and as the days slipped by one green jet after another shot high to break over the derrick. A well came in: pistols cracked along Main Street; there was the sound of running feet, hoarse shouts, as hats sailed into the air and candles were lit in windows. Strike! The belt had been hit, and it was like planting corn. The drill went down, and oil came up.

Desperate but still dogged, his eyes burning in his head from lack of sleep but with the madness in them, Rand stumbled along the upper hall of the Bannon House while hoarse voices came from behind closed doors. Names wore a groove through his brain. Jones, Spellacy, Taylor, Satterfield, Benson . . . Christ, he'd covered the field. He collided head on with somebody and looked up. Ah-h-h-h! The dark-eyed lass, name o' Molly, with her pitcher in one hand and the wire ring of keys in the other hand.

Rand stood back. He flattened himself against the wall. His hat swept the potted floor as he bowed low.

"Madam, it was unintentional!" There was terror in his voice. "But spare my life this once, and I assure you——"

He stopped as she looked up. He stood there, hat in hand, looking down into the dark eyes. Was that laughter he saw in their depths? He couldn't tell. The next minute the lashes swept her cheek and, turning, she opened the door of a room.

She turned in the doorway to look back at him as he stood there, his eyes deep in his head and with the sweat streaking his face. For a minute she seemed about to speak. Then her eyes dropped again, and the door closed behind her.

Rand met the Erie train. He hovered along the boardwalks of Main Street, kept a weather eye out in barrooms, and the days slipped from under him. Only three days were left the night he heard the tinkle of bells and looked up to see in the crawling line of teams a covered wagon with clusters of bright pans glistening in the street lights behind a sleek prancing team. He was in the street; he had the off horse by the reins; he set it back on its haunches, and from the wagon Simon's shrewd, kindly eyes peered out at him from under jutting black eyebrows and the dusty bowler hat that rode his ears.

"Rand!" The shrewd eyes lit up. "It is you?"

Rand took Simon to his room and lit the lamp. In the bed Willie Maguire slept rosily. Willie breathed in and breathed out with a gentle swish, oblivious, as Rand settled Simon comfortably in the chair. Simon had heard of the new field on his trip down the Creek and swerved north.

"Where there is oil," Simon said, "there is buizness."

Abby? It went well with Abby. Danny was going down East to school.

"And you, Rand?" Simon's shrewd eyes ran over him. "It goes good with you too, no?"

Rand spread his map across Simon's knees and, his hands in his pockets, strode up and down the room. With his words the pots and pans faded into Simon's past, the long hard road. Before Simon opened a short cut to wealth and ease. Simon pushed his dusty bowler back on his head. His spectacles rode the hooked nose as Simon peered at the map on his lap.

"Timber?" Simon shrugged, palms up. "A man could lose. Lumber, it is up, and then it is down.

"Oil? A man could lose. Mebbe it's a dry hole and mebbe no. And oil, it is twenty dollars a barrel and then it is ten cents."

"Have you got a wife?" Rand stood over Simon, the madness

in his eyes. "Are children of yours crying for bread? No, by God!"

Simon drew his head into his collar like a turtle, and only the black side whiskers kept it from slipping on through. Drops of sweat stood out on Simon's forehead, but in the end Simon shook his head. Patiently Simon held up the first three fingers of his left hand.

"Here is the land, Rand, and timber and oil." Simon pointed to the first finger. "Here is Simon with the carpets and curtains and dishes and pans." Simon pointed to the second finger. "Here is the women." Simon pointed to the third finger and shrugged again, palms up. "With the land and timber and oil and coal, it is the same. In the middle, a man can't lose."

Rand's eyes blazed. His hand closed over the black cravat and high collar. He jerked Simon half out of the chair, and the bowler rolled across the floor. The map slid from Simon's knees.

"Damn you, Simon! Is it worth nothing to you to see what's at the bottom of just one hole on Music Mountain?"

He saw it in Simon's eyes before Simon could speak. His grip relaxed, and Simon slumped back in the chair with the sweat streaking his face.

"Rand, I tell you the truth! I wouldn't walk across the street to see it."

And then there were two days left. Rand walked into the barroom of the Bannon House. His eyes took quick inventory of the jostling crowd along the bar. Making change from the dishpan, Mike Bannon fixed him with a dour eye. Mopping, Murphy rolled a grave eye toward him. Willie Maguire was at the bar, his cloth-topped patent-leather shoe on the rail with oil-soaked boots of driller and tool dresser, off tour. Willie looked up. He edged along the bar to Rand. There was a sly knowing look in the mischievous little eyes as Willie's pudgy fingers fumbled in a pocket of his broad-checked waistcoat. He handed Rand a slip of paper.

"Found it under the door!" Willie whispered it behind his plump hand. Willie's thumb gave Rand a knowing poke in the

ribs, and Rand looked down to read, "Would Mr. Bole care to see a friend in Room 26?"

Room 26? His eyebrows drawn together, Rand walked up the potted steps and down the long dim hall. He tapped on the door; it opened, and there stood the dark-eyed lass, name o' Molly! She said, "Will you come in?" She closed the door and stood with her back to it, her hands behind her.

The room was ready for the next occupant. There was the bed with its white counterpane, a chair, the washbowl and pitcher on the commode. Rand stood in the center of the room, a thumb in either waistcoat pocket, one eyebrow up as he regarded the girl with her back against the door. The dark eyes were steady, but a pulse pounded in her temple.

"An unexpected pleasure, madam!" His eyes were amused, mocking, and her chin went up.

"I sent George Berry to you," she said, and Rand's jaw dropped. He said, "You?"

"You said you were a timber scout." The bosom under the close basque rose and fell. "And I know him for—for a man of honor."

A timber scout. Rand smiled. A little fabrication common among oil operators to keep the landowners from becoming excited. He was, as she had doubtless deduced, an oil operator from the Creek. He talked from the teeth out. His mind had gone winging to the dishpan downstairs on the bar. Could there be a way to Mike Bannon through this girl? Bowing, he said gravely, "I am indebted to you, madam, for an option on seven thousand acres of the finest timber land in the state."

"But—oil?" The dark eyes were anxious, probing his.

Oil? Rand walked the floor, his hands in his pockets, and his words had the ring of honest caution. Of course, he had had an offer from Matt Dwyer, one of the most successful operators on the Creek, and Bingham was holding his tract at a quarter of a million. For himself, Rand wouldn't hesitate a minute, but unfortunately he wasn't in position at present to take up his option alone and unaided, and he had hoped to find a more congenial backer than Dwyer.

"All I need is the twenty-eight thousand dollars." It was as if he were talking out loud to himself as he walked, thinking. "Twenty-eight thousand dollars and—well, an eighth of the oil for me, say, and somebody makes a cleaning."

He looked up and caught her off guard. He saw the awareness of him in the dark eyes, naked for the second, and the shy trust. The eyes dropped, and crimson stained the clear pallor. The pulse pounded in her temple. The bosom rose and fell.

"I have some money of my own from Ireland." She looked at the floor.

Rand stood rooted for a split second. He saw Ma in the firelight with the Holy Writ in her lap. He heard Ma say, "What is thy duty to thy neighbor?" But there was the timber, wasn't there? And, by God, Dwyer wanted it, didn't he? It was only a split second before Rand said easily, barely breathing, "And Irish money is lucky!"

"My mother came from Ireland, and I was going—home, but——"

She looked up. Their eyes met and held. In the dark eyes Rand saw depths of aching loneliness. In his eyes she saw quickened interest and warmth. It was restrained warmth, and deferent; a warmth that offered her haven and would protect her even from itself.

"Could we call it the—the Lennon Oil Company?" she said.

12

THEY WERE DOWN TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED FEET ON Lennon No. 1, and Willie Maguire had been busier than a hen on a hot dough dish. Puffing, his pink cheeks and belly jouncing, Willie pumped the one-arm Johnny to bring water for the boiler from the tumbling mountain stream. Willie cleaned the boiler flues. Willie kept a full head of steam up, a red-hot forge. Willie's sledge hit the cherry-red bit, stroke for stroke with Rand, sharpening it to gauge. Willie cleaned and greased the engine, the pitman. He sprang to brake the bull wheels as they ran the tools in the hole and pulled them out to run the bailer. Willie helped dump the sand pumpings from the bailer into the bucket for the sample of sand, and then down the dump hole. They hit eighteen hundred feet. They hit two thousand. Willie's round pink face lengthened out.

Twenty-five hundred feet, and no showing. Willie looked at Rand on the driller's stool. He said, "Christ, you must be halfway to China, ain't you?"

"All right, we'll pull 'em!" Rand said.

They pulled the tools and ran the bailer. They dumped the sample into the bucket, the rest down the dump hole. On their knees beside the bucket, they ran the watery sand through their fingers. Willie looked at Rand. Rand got up to walk to the door of the rig. He leaned out the door and vomited. He stood there a minute, looking at the pines that walled them in. He turned then to Willie.

"She's dry, Willie," he said. "Drier than a covered bridge. We'll move the rig."

They had to clear the road for the team to haul the rig and

tools over stumps. They had to make a clearing to set the rig up again. Swinging his ax with Rand, sweating, Willie said, "I don't care if I never see another gol-durned tree." But they built the rig in the clearing and began again. And again. Three dry holes. Willie said, "This whole gol-durned mountain's drier'n a calvin' cow!"

They ate in the rig and slept by turns in the rig. The icy blast roared around it, moaning in the pines, and in it was the thin high howl of roaming wolf packs. Wildcats screamed. Snow swept against the rig, and in it were the tracks of deer and bear, the prowling cats. Spent, Rand slept on the derrick floor an hour at a time, but even as he slept he kept one ear attuned to the churn of the tools in the hole, the sound of the engine, one eye on Willie. Willie had gone slack. Only his unhappy little eyes showing between his wound wool scarf and the cap pulled down over his ears, Willie huddled against the potbellied derrick stove. Willie whimpered, "Christ, no wonder th' Indians wouldn't stay here!" Flesh fell away from Rand. His cheeks were deep bearded hollows. His eyes sank in his head.

And it was on Lennon No. 4 that the cable broke. They were seventeen hundred feet down when the cable broke and dropped the tools in the hole. Snow blew through the cracks between the planks of the derrick walls, the wind roared through the pines, and Willie hugged the stove while Rand fished for the tools in the hole. Fishing, he lost track of day and night, but he couldn't get a grip on the tools in the hole with the slip socket. The tools were in the hole to stay.

"All right, we'll skid the rig," he said to Willie.

Willie whimpered. He said, "A man c'n wear hisself out dressin' tools. There ain't nothin' like it 'less it's farmin'." Willie wept. He wanted his money. Willie said, "It ain't like you couldn't get yourself another man."

"You're the man I want," Rand said, but in the end he had to back Willie into a corner. He had to take Willie by the throat and shake him like a rat. He had to cuff Willie's ears before Willie, terrified, said, "Yes, sir! No, sir! Yes, sir!"

Lennon No. 5 was dry. Drier than a covered bridge. Rand

had to shake Willie again, cuffing him. It was April; swollen streams tumbled downhill. Rand did Willie's work and his own while Willie sat in the door of the rig with his rifle. Willie got himself a deer, an eleven-point buck, from the door of the rig. He got rabbits and coons while Rand went down two thousand feet on Lennon No. 6. Two thousand, twenty-two hundred, twenty-four hundred. With a slingshot Willie felled a wild turkey. Rand pulled the tools and ran the bailer, dumped the sample into the bucket, the rest down the dump hole. Willie had just raised his rifle and was peering along its barrel into the pines when he heard a dry rasping sob and turned.

He saw Rand on his knees beside the bucket. He saw Rand go down on all fours. He saw Rand drop his head to kiss the derrick floor. Then he saw Rand pitch forward on his face in a dead faint beside the bucket. Willie dropped his rifle and scrambled to his feet. He stared down into the bucket. He saw the greenish, opalescent scum floating atop the water in the bucket. His little eyes bulging, Willie said, "Christ!"

He sloshed water from the water barrel over Rand until Rand sat up. Rand sat there on the floor while the water dripped from him, staring at the bucket. Willie breathed, "Christ! And seven thousand acres of it!" Rand shook his head to clear it. He got to his hands and knees, to his feet. He said, "We'll plug the hole and tear down the rig."

"Plug 'er?" Willie's face fell. He said, "Christ, why don't we drill 'er in?"

"I want to see Ed Bingham." Rand brushed his hand across his eyes and looked again at the bucket.

But Ed Bingham was in New York, and Rand walked the floor of their room in Hotel La Pierre, thinking. If he sent Willie to New York in pursuit of Ed Bingham it would tip his hand.

"When do I draw my pay?" In his broad checks again and his hard hat, twirling his cane, Willie sat on the bed.

"When I get damned good and ready!" Rand turned on him.

He drilled Willie in his part, his hand on Willie's throat.

Willie was to meet the Erie from New York every night of his life until Ed Bingham got off it.

"You miss one night, and I'll draw and quarter you, damn you!" Rand shook Willie, and Willie said, "Yes, sir. . . . Yes, sir!"

"All right, say it!" Rand ordered.

"Good day, Bingham," Willie began.

"*Mister* Bingham, damn you!" Rand cuffed Willie.

"Good day, *Mister* Bingham!" Willie knew it by heart. "Been away, have you? Well, well! A stroke o' luck, me meetin' up with you right now. Fact is, Mr. Bingham, I been plannin' t' go into oil, and I been thinkin' o' makin' a dicker with you f'r your tract on Music Mountain. I wouldn't care t' go too high account o' Rand Bole drillin' six dry holes next t' you, but—"

Willie stopped, his little eyes puzzled. He said, "He'll take me up, and what'll you use f'r money?"

"I'm an eighth owner in Lennon Oil, you damned fool!" Rand shook Willie again. "I can borrow on it, can't I? And if he raises the ante, jump for it. You hear me? Now say it again, damn you!"

Ed Bingham lingered in New York, but Willie with his fat, foolish face was perfect in the part, and it was May. Miss Flora Grey, society editor for the flourishing *Era*, wrote, "What two young men from Oil Creek are courting one of oildom's fairest daughters who wears a lock of blond hair in a crystal brooch that could belong to either?"

Willie leaned against the Erie station, swinging his cane and mumbling his part. But the stone deer shone white in the moonlight beside the spraying fountain. The spreading veranda was festooned with strings of Chinese lanterns swaying in the soft breeze. Musicians clustered around the rosewood piano, and through the long windows came the strains of "Cagliostro," a waltz and galop by Strauss, as Rand and Petty danced on the veranda. The ridge of hills, dotted with twinkling lanterns and gas flares, was a waving line against the starlit sky, and from

hill to hill echoed the chug of engines, the creak of walking beams.

"Rand, I must dance with Tommy Meldrum," Petty sighed. Rand's arm tightened around the tiny waist. Petty's dress was white silk strewn with rosebuds. The basque, tightly drawn to the tiny waist, ended in a point. The skirt, clinging close, was draped high over the bustle to fall in soft folds. Petty held her train with one slim hand as they danced toward a shadowy corner, whirling; the bright curls caught the light of the lanterns.

"Not without the permission of your affianced husband, madame!" Rand's cheek touched the bright curls. "Have you told Jim Preston?"

"Shhhh!" Jim Preston wasn't one of the dancers, but Petty's hand pressed against Rand's mouth. "And shame on you, Rand Bole. Affianced indeed!"

Rand caught her close. He tilted the pointed chin up and looked down into the eyes blue as the sea in the sun.

"Who promised to marry me?" he said, and Petty said, "But you haven't even asked Papa!"

The music ended with a muted flourish of violin notes, and gangling Tommy Meldrum hovered wistfully in the offing. Rand's jaw line hardened. He said to Petty, "All right, where is Papa?"

"In the library." Petty was breathless, suddenly frightened. One hand went to her heart; the other was on Rand's arm. Her eyes widened. "Oh, Rand, do be nice, won't you?"

The orchestra swung into "Bismarck," a schottische and polka; Petty slipped away from him into Tommy Meldrum's arms, and Rand turned toward the library. It was a dim, cavernous room, darkly paneled in oak, with books on shelves of varnished oak behind glass, their bindings of imitation morocco glinting with gilded and incised decorations of vines and leaves. Under the light Matt Dwyer looked up from his book. He laid it aside, swung the pince-nez by the silk ribbon, and cleared his throat.

"Sit down, Bole!" His voice was casually affable. He motioned Rand into a chair under the light and moved his own chair back into the shadows. He said, "So you got another dry hole, eh? Makes five, doesn't it?"

"Six!" Rand's chagrin was barely perceptible. "Plugged it and tore the rig down."

"Had enough, have you?" Dwyer chuckled.

"I've had plenty." A ring whitened around Rand's mouth with the memory of it.

"You brought Ed Bingham down from the clouds." Dwyer chuckled again. "I saw him the day he left for New York, and he was green around the gills."

Rand felt the hawk eyes upon him from the shadows. His eyes turned to the window. The music had stopped, and through the window came the sound of laughter and muffled voices.

"I'd like your permission to marry Petty, sir." Rand was nice.

The silence from the shadows was long and pregnant. Rand crossed and recrossed his knees. The music was "Marien," a quadrille waltz, and through the window came the sound of dancing feet.

"Bole"—Dwyer's voice was coolly contained—"you've stripped one woman of her inheritance, haven't you?"

"She still has the timber." Rand squirmed ever so slightly in his chair. "You couldn't help me turn it for her, could you?"

"Not at four dollars an acre. And at the present price of lumber."

"She's asking four dollars," Rand said.

"On your advice?" Dwyer was amused.

"You wanted to take over my option at four dollars," Rand said.

"I've changed my mind." Dwyer chuckled. "You're in for trouble with Mike Bannon, I'm afraid."

"I'm looking forward to it." Rand stiffened in his chair.

"Not a bright prospect for any man's daughter, are you?" Dwyer was still amused, and Rand said, "Or for her father?"

Dwyer got up from his chair. Rand got up from his. They

faced each other across the lamp, and Dwyer's eyes were impersonal, detached.

"Bole," he said, "I've allowed Petty to have you here for the sake of old times on the Creek, but——"

"You've prompted Petty to have me here!" Rand's jaw shot forward. "And for the sake of keeping track of Music Mountain."

Their eyes met and held, crossing swords, and then Dwyer was amused again. He said, "Well, let's put it this way—I know all I want to know about Music Mountain now."

"And Petty has given me her promise!" Rand said.

"I should take a horsewhip to you, Bole, but I'll leave it to Petty." Dwyer chuckled again. "I daresay three out of four of the young men on the porch have Petty's promise."

"Then we leave it to Petty?" Rand's smile stopped short of his eyes.

"We leave it to Petty!" Dwyer donned his spectacles and picked up his book.

Petty was dancing with Tommy Meldrum again. "Turn about is fair play!" Petty's laughter bubbled up as she slipped from Tommy's arms to Rand's. They waltzed around an angle of the veranda and stopped. Rand's arm tightened around the tiny waist. He drew Petty close, and in his ears was the lilt of "The Bells of Corneville." *One-two-three, one-two-three.* One of Petty's slim hands was on either of his shoulders as she looked up at his face, white and set in the moonlight. Her eyes widened; her lips parted. *One-two-three, one-two-three.* The beat was in Rand's blood, surging. The scent of violets was in his nostrils.

His mouth came down on Petty's. Her arms crept around his neck, clinging. Her lips under his were sweet and fragrant, warm and responsive. She was breathless then and shaken. She buried her face in her hands against his shoulder.

"Petty, how soon?" Rand's cheek was against the bright curls.

"Oh, Rand! Papa said no, didn't he?" There was despair in the murmur against his shoulder. There were tears in Petty's

eyes looking up at him; tears shining like diamonds in the moonlight. "Papa would cut me off, and there are so many things I want—so much I want to see. Paris and Vienna and——"

"Someday, Petty," Rand promised.

"But I'll be old then!" A shiver ran through Petty. "Old and ugly."

"Petty, look at me!" Rand's hand under the pointed chin tilted it up. "Can you keep a secret? For us?"

"You mean not—not to tell Papa?" Petty's lip still trembled.

"*Nobody.*" Rand kissed the trembling lip. "For us?"

"For us, I—I could." Petty's eyes widened. She caught her breath. "Rand, it—— Oh, Rand, it wasn't a well? *Rand, tell me quick!*"

Rand caught her close. His cheek, pressed hard against hers, was wet with her tears. His lips brushed her ear as he whispered, "*Follow me, sweet, and wear diamonds.*"

It was all right; safe in Petty's hands. Ed Bingham was still in New York, but Willie stood vigil at the station. It was all right. Rand walked on air through the ornate lobby of the new Hotel La Pierre. It was a place of red carpets, potted palms, tufted leather, and shining brass spittoons, crowded and smoke-filled. Rand saw only hurriedly turned backs and cold shoulders. Groups of men melted away in his path. They avoided his eyes.

Except for the night clerk at the desk. His Adam's apple bobbed nervously up and down as he caught Rand's eye. He squeaked, "Just a minute, Mr. Bole." He tapped on the door of the office behind the desk. "Monsieur would like a word with you."

The door opened, and Jacques Bedour loomed in the doorway, resplendent in tails, his mustaches waxed to bristling points. Bowing, he said, "Ah, yes, Mr. Bole! Will you step in?" Monsieur, too, had had an ear to the ground. Smiling, he went through the motion of washing his hands. There was this matter of Mr. Bole's bill between them on the desk. An oversight, no doubt.

Rand leaned idly against the door, his hands in his pockets,

his hat on the back of his head. His eyes, opaque, examined Monsieur Bedour.

"You realize," he said coolly, "that you're talking to the president of Lennon Oil?"

Monsieur Bedour bowed low. He straightened, and there was a flicker of contempt in the shrewd Gallic eyes. Lennon Oil? Ah, yes, Lennon Oil! Jacques smiled, and it was in the smile. But more commonly spoken of as Pimp Oil, *n'est-ce pas?* And Rand Bole had stripped the Bannon woman of all but her last penny now, so what would you? A man was not in business for the pleasure of it.

"Our accounts are payable the first of each month." Monsieur still smiled, still washed his hands.

"An oversight, monsieur." Rand shrugged, annoyed. "I'll attend to it at my convenience."

His eyes were mocking, hard, as Monsieur hesitated, wavering. He saw Jacques mentally throw up his hands. Oil! Down today and up tomorrow, and how was a man to know who would be his most lavish patron by sunrise? Monsieur was a gambler himself, or he wouldn't be there. Their eyes met, and it was Jacques Bedour who folded his hand.

"I'll take your word for it, sir!" Helpless, Monsieur still smiled.

Whistling softly through his teeth, Rand walked up the grand red-carpeted stairway, his eyes straight front. He opened the door of his room, lit the gas jet, and saw Willie Maguire rosily asleep in the bed. Willie breathed in and out with a gentle swish. Rand shook him, and Willie sat up, blinking.

Yes, sir, he had been at the station. Yes, *sir!* Willie raised his plump right hand. No, *sir*, he hadn't seen hide nor hair of Ed Bingham. If the bastard had got off that train, Willie was a so-and-so! Rand walked the floor, his eyebrows drawn together, while Willie sat up in bed, his elbows on the plump knees, his round chin in the dimpled hands. Willie was perfect for the part! *One-two-three, one-two-three.* The beat was in Rand's blood again as he walked. The Bingham tract would be his and his alone. He would be an eighth owner of seven thousand lush

acres on Music Mountain and sole owner of two thousand acres. Rand Bole . . . And they had passed the hat for him on the Creek. Rand Bole . . . And he had huddled, shivering, against the chimney in the attic while the blast roared down from the hills with the thin high howl of wolves in it!

Pimp Oil, eh? Damn them, he'd ram that down their throats. Christ, Mike Bannon's daughter could buy and sell any six of them this minute! Let him drill through the pine plugs in Lennon No. 6 and see them eat their words! Watch 'em scramble like rats to the floor of the Exchange to unload! And as for Rand Bole . . . *There are so many things I want, so much I want to see. . . . Rings and things are what I need.* Rand's face softened. He smiled, remembering. Sapphire. S-a-double-p-h-i-r-e. *Follow me, sweet, and wear diamonds.*

And then, in his hour of triumph, he saw Ma in the firelight with the Holy Writ. He heard Ma say, "What is thy duty toward thy neighbor?" His eyes turned to Willie's pink, foolish face. Willie was easy prey, and Rand knew a sudden humbleness before the might of the natural force at his finger tips.

"Willie," he said, walking, "I'll be a power in oil—and may God guide my hand."

But Willie came back empty-handed from the station next day, and the next. The third day Rand walked the floor of his room until he heard Willie's hand on the doorknob. Willie opened the door. The mischievous little eyes were bewildered. Willie mopped his pink face and his forehead. He stuttered, "A n-nigger in the w-woodpile s-somewhere."

Rand took Willie by the throat and backed him up against the wall. Yes, Bingham had got off the train. Yes, Willie had fallen in with him. Yes, Willie had said his part, word for word, so help him! Willie raised a plump and shaking right hand. But Bingham had run into Jim Preston at the Stevens Hotel in New York, and Bingham had let the tract go to Jim Preston for the eighth royalty. To Jim Preston and Matt Dwyer.

"And they s-say in the s-street," Willie stuttered, "that D-Dwyer's gone short a m-million b-barrels on the Exchange. C-Christ, he-he'll m-make a c-cleaning when y-you d-drill in!"

Willie blanched as Rand's hand tightened on his throat. Rand shook him like a fat pink rat.

"You lie!" Rand said it through his teeth. "Damn you, say you lie!"

But he saw it in Willie's eyes bulging out onto the fat cheeks. He knew it before Willie raised his shaking right hand. He saw Jim Preston stalking Bingham to New York, waiting for Dwyer's wire over a drink at the bar with Bingham even while he himself had kissed away Petty's tears. *What two young men from Oil Creek are courting one of oildom's fairest daughters who wears a lock of blond hair in a crystal brooch that could belong to either?*

Slowly Rand's hand relaxed on Willie's throat, but Willie flattened himself against the wall at the sight of Rand's face, livid and wrung. He saw Rand's hands, writhing, knot into fists, and Willie slid along the wall to a corner while Rand's eyes followed him with that oddly vacant look in them. Then Rand smiled with a writhing of his facial muscles, and the smile froze Willie to the marrow.

"Willie," Rand said, and his voice was gentle, "I'll still be a power in oil, *and to hell with my neighbor.*"

THERE WAS ANOTHER PIECE FROM THE BRADFORD *Era* in Rand's waistcoat pocket when he drew up before the Bannon House. The piece was Miss Flora Grey at her peak. It dealt with the wedding of Miss Pleasance Dwyer, "one of oil-dom's fairest flowers," to Mr. James Preston, "scion of one of our first oil families and a partner of the bride's father in the new oil-producing firm of Dwyer & Preston."

"The beauteous bride," wrote Miss Flora, "and the stalwart groom exchanged vows in a bower of roses and smilax reminiscent of Titania's bower in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*."

Rand hitched the team to the rail and felt for the bottle of whisky in his hip pocket. It was there. He opened the door of the bar, stepped inside, closed the door behind him, and stood there with his hands in his pockets and his hat on the back of his head, looking the crew at the bar over through the clouds of smoke. They stood six deep, brawny driller and toolie, roustabout pipeliner and lumberjack. Mike Bannon was behind the bar with Murphy. Groaner Mack, a brawling and barrel-chested roustabout, slapped the man next to him on the back, guffawing. Groaner looked up. He saw Rand. The guffaw died in his throat, and his jaw dropped. Groaner muttered out of the side of his mouth to the man next to him. The mutter ran through the crowd like wildfire, dying away into a delighted silence as more jaws dropped, and they turned to stare at Rand. Bole had walked into it! Mike Bannon had been looking for Bole high and low, and Bole had walked into it.

They made way for Rand as he walked up to the bar, their

eyes slyly lighting up. His foot idly on the rail, Rand leaned an arm along the bar. Mike Bannon was absorbed in making change from his dishpan. He tossed the change along the bar, fished the roll of bills from his pocket to wrap another bill around it. The silence penetrated his absorption then, and he glanced up. Murphy's ruddiness had faded. Murphy swabbed the murky rag along the bar busily, looking down, but his hand was unsteady.

"Hello, Mike," Rand said affably. "Just let me have a glass, will you?"

Mike stood rooted, speechless and purpling with rage. Oblivious, Rand helped himself from a row of glasses on the bar. He took the bottle of whisky from his hip pocket, poured himself a generous drink from it, and put the bottle back into his pocket, preoccupied. He raised his glass, examined its clear amber contents in the light. He downed the drink neat, set the glass down, smacked his lips, and looked at Mike.

"You know, Mike," he said, still affable, "I find myself growing particular about whisky. It wouldn't surprise me if you've lost a customer."

Mike's face had mottled over in leprosy-like spots. The eyes for the main chance under the black eyebrows were live coals in his head.

"You goddamned thieving pimp!" Mike found his voice, and his bellow cut the silence like a roll of thunder. He reached under the bar for his loaded billiard cue. He came around the bar with it, bellowing like a gored bull. "I'll take every damned dollar of it out of your hide!"

He swung the billiard cue. It whistled through the air. Rand ducked and came up with a right to Mike's jaw, his full weight behind it. The right connected with a sharp smack. Mike's jaws snapped shut, his head snapped back, and he measured his length with a thud in the sawdust, the billiard cue beside him. A little sigh ran along the bar like a gust of wind as Rand stood over Mike. Rand kicked the billiard cue aside.

Mike moved. He got to his hands and knees in the sawdust. He got to his feet. He came in with his head down for the butt, and Rand's big-hole boot caught him in the teeth. Mike

straightened, spat two teeth out from between split lips, and Rand caught him again with a right to the jaw. Again Mike's jaws snapped shut, his head snapped back; again he measured his length in the sawdust with the thud. His eyes opened. He moved. He got to his hands and knees, to his feet. He came in slowly then, watchful and weaving, with the blood streaming from his mouth, his chin in. Rand's left slipped through his guard, straightening him up and spinning his head on the thick neck. Again Rand's right to the jaw caught him, and again the thud. Mike lay still, sprawled on his back in the sawdust, his eyes shut. Standing over him, Rand looked along the row of customers flattened against the bar. Their eyes shifted uneasily.

"Gentlemen," Rand said, and his voice was gentle, "you know my name. It's Mr. Bole." His eyes came to rest on Groaner Mack. "We understand each other, Groaner?"

Groaner's eyes darted from one to the other of the men around him, but they avoided him, and singled out, Groaner shuffled in his boots until, swallowing, he said out of the side of his mouth, "Yeuh."

"Yes?" Rand's eyes held his. "Yes, *what?*"

"Yes—Mr. Bole." Groaner said it out of the side of his mouth.

"That's it, Groaner!" Rand glanced down at Mike Bannon at his feet and caught Mike off guard. Mike's eyes were open, glaring up at him, but Mike shut them quickly and lay stone-still. Rand picked up the billiard cue, laid it beside Mike, dusted his hands, and, turning on his heel, walked through the door of the bar to the hall.

He walked up the potted stairway and down the hall to the door of the little room over the kitchen. He rapped on the door, and Molly opened it. The room was bare as a nun's cell. There was the bed, the commode with its bowl and pitcher; no chair. Rand stood with his back against the door. Molly stood with her back against the opposite wall, her hands behind her.

"I'm going to drill once more on Music Mountain," Rand said, and his voice was still gentle.

"All right," she said without the flicker of an eyelash, and he

stood there looking at her. So they called her the Bannon woman, did they? But not for long. He'd ram that down their throats too.

"I've just had a little trouble with your father," he said. "I can't leave you here. We'd better be married."

He saw the pulse pounding in her temple, at the base of her throat. He saw the dark eyes mist softly over as she stood there looking at him, her hands tightly clasped behind her. She shook her head.

"I don't care about the money," she said. "There's the timber, and I—I'm not afraid."

"I'm damned if I'll leave you here!" Rand's jaw line tightened, but she shook her head again, looking down.

"You don't want to marry me. I—I am Molly Bannon."

"You'll be Mrs. Rand Bole. It won't matter who the lady *was*."

She shook her head again, looking down with her lip caught between her teeth. Rand walked across the room and stood looking down at her. She looked up. He saw the awareness of him in the dark eyes, the aching loneliness, the shy trust.

"You don't want to marry me." Her eyes probed his. "You don't want to, do you?"

"I don't want to marry you?" Avoiding her eyes, Rand laid his hat on the commode. "I don't want to?" His arms went around her, and then somehow he found himself clinging to her even as he said, "I'd want to marry you if you were the devil's daughter."

They were married in the parlor of the Baptist parsonage by the Reverend Jeremiah Foster. The parlor was furnished with the castoffs of the reverend's flock. Slits in the horsehair covering of the walnut settee exposed grimy cotton wadding. The faded carpet had worn through around the rusty stove in the corner. There were greasy finger marks around the coal-smoked walls, and the smell of cooking onions came from the kitchen.

The reverend eked out a living with farming and hunting in addition to guiding his flock. He was a lean, bony-faced

man, twin to Brother Lanz on the Creek, and full to the brim with inner grace. In his eyes burned all the zealot's fire. It said the reverend regarded the ceremony as a travesty; better late than never, but a travesty. He declined to don his coat. In his shirt sleeves, with the book in his hand, he called, "Hitty!"

Hitty came in from the kitchen. A weary little wisp of a woman in a bedraggled wrapper and apron, she carried the baby on her hip. In the kitchen door behind her the rest of her brood stood staring: seven of them, and like so many steps. Their mouths and hands were sticky with sorghum syrup; their noses ran. Hitty saw Molly: her eyes widened; her mouth tightened as if she were drawing her spiritual skirts aside.

"You will join hands," the reverend said, and then Molly's hand was in Rand's.

Through the window came the rumble and roll of wagon wheels like distant thunder, the echoing chug of engines to mingle with the reverend's rasping voice. The baby whimpered, fretful, and loosening the wrapper, Hitty gave him her breast. In the kitchen doorway the staring steps sniffled and giggled.

"And forsaking all others, cleave only unto her so long as ye both shall live?" The reverend's rasp stopped on a rising note. He peered over his spectacles at Rand.

"I will," Rand said.

The onions had boiled over in the kitchen; there was the hiss of steam.

". . . to have and to hold from this day forward." It was Molly's voice.

Hitty made motions to the tallest girl in the doorway. In a loud whisper Hitty said, "Vinnie, set th' kettle off!"

". . . I pronounce that they are man and wife." It was the reverend's rasp, and it was over.

Aside with the reverend, Rand drew his wallet from his pocket and extracted a bill, but the reverend shook his head, aloof. His eyes with the zealot's fire in them went beyond Rand to Molly.

"The wages of sin are not for the Lord or for His faithful

servant," the reverend said, but something behind the zeal in his eyes said he might be persuaded.

"I wouldn't want you to violate your conscience, Reverend!" His eyes sardonic, Rand replaced the bill in his wallet.

He turned to see Molly holding the baby. Flushed and flustered, Hitty furtively slipped something into her apron pocket. It was Hitty who saw them to the door, the baby on her hip again. Hitty followed them out onto the stoop. She wiped the baby's mouth with a corner of her apron, her eyes following Molly.

"I'm sure I wish you luck, Mrs. Bole," Hitty said.

Lucky No. 6! Rigging up again, Rand moved the boiler back to a safe distance. He drilled through the pine plugs and into the sand. Gas seeped up from the hole, and Willie danced around him. Drilling on, an intent look in his eyes, he heard a rumble. The rumble was a roar. The green jet shot from the hole, blowing the tools from the hole with it high over the derrick, where it broke to fall in a shower. Shut in, Lennon No. 6 flowed every fifteen minutes; and listening to the surge of oil through the pipes to the tanks, Willie, bug-eyed, breathed, "Christ!"

It was three whole days before Miss Flora Grey of the *Era* caught up. Briefly and tentatively, then, she noted "the marriage at the Baptist parsonage of Rand Bole, the young man from the Creek who recently brought in the gusher on Music Mountain that extended the field by twelve miles and paralyzed the market, to Mary Bannon, daughter of Mike Bannon of the Bannon House."

"Rumor hath it," Miss Flora wrote, "that Cupid's dart was dipped in oil."

14

THE FIELD WAS RUNNING WIDE OPEN NOW. SWEET-faced wives and children began to step down from the Erie coaches to be swallowed into the maelstrom of the forty boardinghouses, the ninety saloons and four banks, the livery stables and mushrooming shops that hugged each other close along Main Street, and pounding hammers vied with the echoing chug of engine and drill, the scream of saws, as hurriedly built houses fanned out into fields. Main Street was a river of never-freezing oil-slimed mud into which toiling horses dropped to smother before they could be cut loose from the harness. Boys in hip boots laid three-inch planks from boardwalk to a chunk of drive pipe anchored in the middle of the street, and from the drive pipe to the boardwalk on the other side for bonneted ladies to cross shakily in twos and threes, their panniered skirts held ankle-high.

Good women hesitated to appear alone. Driller, tool dresser, and roustabout changed tours at noon and midnight. Brothels and saloons, dance houses, variety shows and gambling dens ran wide open twenty-four hours a day. Along the boardwalks the madams paraded their girls; pimps circulated in the jostling crowds of bearded men in big-hole boots and oil-soaked jeans, and bedizined harlots strayed boldly across the bridge from Pig Island to solicit. Good women shopped in twos and threes, their trains in one hand, their baskets in the other.

They were a close-knit clique who had come together through the days on the Creek, in Titusville, Pithole, Petroleum Center, where they had learned to ride the shining crest of oil with their eyes modestly averted from its turgid undercurrent.

In Simond's Emporium they dropped train and basket to hold out both hands, and standing alone at the yard-goods counter, Molly heard them say, "Melodia, my dear! When did you arrive?" Their gowns and dolmans and bonnets spoke of quality and craftsmanship. In their words and laughter were echoes of euchre games and Swordsmen's promenade concerts and balls. Miss Flora Grey was beginning, in the *Bradford Era*, to walk a tightrope between timber and oil.

Laughter and lace! But if the feminine eyes of either timber or oil came to rest upon Molly, alone at the yard-goods counter, they were quickly averted. Even the eyes of the spinsterish saleswoman were veiled as she said, "Two yards of our best quality nainsook?"

"Two yards, please," Molly said shyly. "It—it's turned cold, hasn't it?"

"Very. A dollar and a half, please." Behind Molly's back she would whisper, "The Bannon woman! Yes, Rand Bole's Irish chambermaid. Could she be expecting, do you suppose? That's 'most a bolt of nainsook she's bought!"

Eyes bored into Molly's back as she turned out of Simond's Emporium onto the boardwalk. The walk was coated with an inch-thick slime of slush and oil and mud. In the street hairless teams strained into collars and blacksnakes whistled, teamsters cursed until their breath was white hoar on their beards. Doors of saloons swung open and shut, and from them came the sour smell of malt and hops, band music, hoarse voices, and ribald laughter as booted and bearded men lurched onto the walk.

Her train in one hand, her basket in the other, Molly stood aside to let Madam Stoddard pass with her girls herded ahead of her, two by two. There was the rustle of silk petticoats, the scent of heavy perfume, as, passing, the girls looked boldly at Molly, letting their eyes run over the sober little bonnet and prim dolman. The Bannon woman, and barrels of it! Barrels!

Ahead of her in the crowd along the walk Molly saw the defiant slant of a red feather on the hat of Buckthorn, the belligerent harlot from Pig Island. Buckthorn passed a knot of

drunken men, and Groaner Mack, a roustabout, slapped her resoundingly across the behind. The fight began. Buckthorn kicked Groaner in the shins. She jerked his battered hat down over his eyes and spat in his face while his fellows roared with drunken delight. "Sic 'im, Buckthorn! Knock 'im out!"

Molly edged warily past. She had all but reached the white-steepled Baptist church when she heard a woman's shrill and strident scream and, stopping, turned. It was Buckthorn. Unwary, Buckthorn had turned onto a plank to cross the street, and under her yawned the three-foot river of mud when Groaner, weaving, seized the end of the plank, raising it, while Buckthorn tottered and struggled to hold her footing, screaming curses and shaking her fists. Groaner lowered the plank, and Buckthorn started on. He raised it again; and, tottering, Buckthorn looked down into the slime, her bedizened haggard face wrung with rage, helpless, while the drunken laughter mocked her, the hoarse shouts of "Sic 'im, Buckthorn! Knock 'im out!"

Groaner raised and lowered the plank, raised it again, and Molly set her basket down. She came to the plank. She said, "If you please!" Surprise throttled the laughter in their throats for the minute. Groaner dropped the plank, and Molly stepped out onto it toward Buckthorn, who called down upon Groaner's head a lingering death and slow burning in hell while the tears froze on her face. Teamsters reined in, watching. Crowds gathered at either end of the plank as Molly, her skirts held ankle-high, her heart thudding, made her way toward Buckthorn. Her back was toward them, and she had no pistol in the folds of her skirt.

She reached Buckthorn, took Buckthorn's hand in hers, but the plank rose and fell, and Molly looked down into the river of mud. There was a sudden hush, the plank steadied, and she looked up to see a slim woman walking calmly toward them on the plank from the other sidewalk, her panniered skirt held ankle-high. She wore a plum-colored plush dolman with chenille fringe and a bonnet to match that spoke of quality and artful craftsmanship. She reached them there on the plank;

two kindly gray eyes looked from behind the nose veil across Buckthorn to Molly, and a quiet voice said, "How do you do! Can you turn? I doubt if I can."

They came to the end of the plank. Buckthorn stepped from it onto the walk, her fist shot out, she caught Groaner off balance, and his battered hat rolled along the walk, as, astride him on her knees in the slush, the red feather askew and her fingers laced in Groaner's hair, Buckthorn thumped his head against the walk until his eyes glazed over while the wind of the drunken laughter turned in her favor. "Sic 'im, Buckthorn! Knock 'im out!"

Molly's eyes clung to the artful bonnet as the slim woman in the plum-colored dolman turned to walk confidently back along the plank to her companion, waiting with the baskets, on the other side. They linked arms, the two ladies over there, but turning, the one in the plum-colored dolman searched the crowd across the street. Her eyes found Molly, she smiled, and then a wave of a lady's gloved hand hailed another lady across the street beside her basket as much as to say, "Good-by, my dear, until we meet again!" Then the planks came up, the hairless teams toiled on, the blacksnakes whistled, and Molly picked up her basket.

The little white-steepled church, abandoned when the bigger church had been knocked down and brought on from Pleasantville, was all but lost among the grandiose false fronts of hotels and banks and saloons. Molly opened the door, shut it, and stood with her back against it. *How do you do! Can you turn? I doubt if I can.* And she was so much alone, with Rand on Music Mountain for days on end. Nights she lay in bed with the pistol under her pillow while the thump of boots along the walk announced the change of tours, bands blared, and guns barked.

A flimsy partition divided the church in half. The front half was again divided into three rooms: the tiny sitting room where a derrick stove glowed red, a makeshift kitchen, a bedroom. The back half was an office where clerks on high stools bent over the books of Lennon Oil, made out the pay roll, and

wrote the checks for Rand to sign. *How do you do! Can you turn? I doubt if I can.*

There was a tap on the door connecting the office and sitting room. Molly opened the door to see one of the clerks with a huge box, come by express.

"For Mr. Bole," he said.

More boots and shoes for Rand, custom-made and of softest leather. Molly added them, pair by pair, to the long row against the wall of the tiny bedroom. In the row were riding boots and field boots; patent-leather shoes, cloth-topped; slippers; gaiters. Rand never seemed to have enough of them, and always at least one size too big. But how he loved them!

Molly sat on the edge of the bed with a pair of the shoes in her hands, looking down at them, and the curve of her mouth was tender. Somewhere . . . somehow . . . Rand had known pain and deep hurt. Her eyes darkened at the thought of pain for Rand, misting over. Yet that very pain had given him his insight into other lives, and he wore that insight like a waving plume with the armor of his strength. No teamster abused a horse the second time on Music Mountain! Yet dogs followed him on the street. Horses nuzzled him for the carrot always in his pocket. He flinched for her at the thought of the baby. He said, "Why can't they come by express?" Dear Rand!

A timid tap on the church door roused her. It was a nervous little man with a portfolio under his arm, wild-eyed, and disheveled. His fine beaver topper sat precariously on his head. His broadcloth overcoat was mud-caked. His gray-striped trousers were snow-soaked to the knees. He was Mr. Peabody from New York, and Mrs. Bole would please to pardon his appearance, but he had made that day a trip to Music Mountain and back by livery sleigh to obtain Mr. Bole's approval of his plans. Mr. Peabody drew his chair gratefully up to the glowing stove and, clearing his throat, regained his aplomb.

"But, of course," he said smoothly, "we like to have the approval of the lady in the case as well."

The portfolio contained floor plans, samples of materials. The firm of architects had been kind enough to furnish Mr. Pea-

body with plans for the grounds and with the floor plans for the thirty-three rooms, and if Mrs. Bole would please to consult them as he talked? Mr. Peabody handed the sketches to Mrs. Bole and cleared his throat. He felt, himself, that the architects had done very well—very well indeed. Mr. Peabody cleared his throat again. He said, "Considering Mr. Bole's stipulations." Many people, of course, contemplating a home of these proportions, might prefer brick or stone to a white frame house—

"I like a white frame house." A pulse had begun to pound in Molly's temple.

"And you are the one to be pleased, madam!" Mr. Peabody rose from his chair to trace his course with a pencil on the sketch on the arm of Molly's chair. Mrs. Bole would note the two stone pillars from which the graveled drive would wind under the porte-cochere to the stables beyond. The white frame house with its chaste Doric pillars supporting the two decks of verandas would be situated on the crest of the hill. Mr. Peabody cleared his throat.

"Bole Hall, it's to be called, as I understand it." Mr. Peabody drew samples of materials from the portfolio.

There was a sample of leather tooled with gold for the library walls. There was a sample of broché for the drawing-room walls. Mr. Peabody said, "Very rare, madam, and very old!" The groundwork of old ivory was embroidered in a delicate design of roses. The artist had been engaged to do the murals for the music room.

"Scenes from the various operas." Mr. Peabody smiled. "These artists! He begrudges the pipe organ the space it will take, but you are a musician, madam?"

"No." The pupils of Molly's eyes were distended. Her hands, folded tightly in her lap, were cold.

"Ah, well, there are musicians to be had for the hiring!" Mr. Peabody hurriedly covered his faux pas by handing Molly a sketch of the crystal chandelier that would hang over the banquet table in the dining hall. It was a piece of great beauty, of course, and also of great price.

"But Mr. Bole was particularly taken with it." Mr. Peabody's eyes probed Molly's.

"And Mr. Bole makes our decisions." Molly ran her tongue over dry lips.

Mr. Peabody had had an ear to the ground, and it was the word for which he had come. He consulted his watch. He had hoped to make that New York train, but there was the matter of the guest suites and—

"If Rand likes them, I'll like them," Molly said, and Mr. Peabody rose with alacrity. It was at the door that he paused to rub his fine beaver topper along the arm of his coat, his expression uneasy. He said, "Am I mistaken, madam, in my impression that Mr. Bole's plans were to be—ah—something in the nature of a surprise for you?"

"No, you aren't mistaken." Molly smiled shakily. "But I'll regard our conference as confidential."

Mr. Peabody's relief was obvious as he chuckled in appreciation of the little joke. But would Mrs. Bole say that he had been in error in making sure that her taste coincided with Mr. Bole's? After all, it was the lady who had most to do with the home, wasn't it?

"No, it—it's all right," Molly said.

Mr. Peabody would go ahead, then, and Mrs. Bole could rest assured that it would be the mission in life of many men, Mr. Peabody among them, to see that Bole Hall realized all Mr. Bole's aspirations.

"And becomes the station of the president of Lennon Oil." Mr. Peabody bowed from the waist and straightened to add, "And may I say that I sympathize with his ambition to provide a proper setting for a charming hostess? I trust that you—and yours!—will be very happy in it, madam."

Molly's eyes, frightened, traveled around the little makeshift sitting room. Then the fright slowly vanished, and her face was softly illumined.

"The house couldn't matter," she said. "The house or—or people. They'll never matter to us. We've been happy here."

THEY HAD COME BY EXPRESS FROM MAISON WORTH, these things so delicately scented with lavender and mignonette in the great box on the bed in the little bedroom. They suggested the rustle of trains on grand staircases, the flirt of fans; gallant gentlemen bending low to kiss slim hands. Molly stood with her hand in Rand's, looking down at them.

"The basque will have to be let out." A blush crept up from her throat. "But Miss Mattie is coming at four o'clock."

Rand was at sea. He stood looking down at a froth of satin and lace, two little lines between his eyes. He said, "You got the best, did you?"

"Rand!" Molly shuddered for him. "You have affronted Monsieur Worth of Paris, France!"

"What was the expense to the management?" Unconvinced, Rand looked down at the froth.

"I can't say it out loud!" Molly clapped her hands to her temples, harried. She looked up at Rand from under her lashes. "But I could whisper it."

Rand bent down. She whispered in his ear, and as she whispered all doubt faded from his eyes and a gleam took its place. He stood with his arms folded across his chest, frowning down at her.

"Didn't you dicker with 'em?" he demanded, stern.

"Dicker!" Molly shivered. "With Monsieur Worth?" She drew herself up. "And, my good man, I am Mrs. Rand Bole!"

"A-a-ah!" Rand saw the light. He whistled through his teeth. "So that's who you are, eh?"

Thinking it over, he drew a velvet box from the hip pocket

of his jeans. He opened it casually and held it out for her inspection. From their satin nest a set of diamonds shone up at her: the brooch, the solitaire earrings, the bracelets. And they whispered of the mud and sweat on Music Mountain; of the chance; of fire and nitroglycerin; of green jets shooting high; of Rand's dogged will to lay diamonds at her feet. She looked up, and her eyes were bright with tears. At what price to the management!

"For—for me?" she said.

"You're Mrs. Rand Bole, aren't you?" A little smile played around Rand's mouth. "And that means you wear diamonds!"

Molly donned the bracelets and earrings. Rand affixed the brooch to the bosom of her starched gray calico and stood off to gauge the effect, the two lines between his eyes.

"Mrs. Rand Bole of Bole Hall!" The little smile played around his mouth again.

Molly drew herself up in flashing splendor to regard him with hauteur as he stood there, his battered oil-soaked hat on the back of his head. Slowly, though, and on due thought, she appeared to find redeeming qualities about him, so she held out a gracious hand. Bending low, Rand kissed it, awed, and then they clung to each other, laughing. The laughter faded from Molly's eyes. Her arms tightened around his neck.

"Rand, they—they won't like me at the ball. I know they won't like me. I—I am Molly Bannon."

"Who did you say you are?" One hand under her chin, Rand tilted it up.

"Mrs. Rand Bole," Molly corrected it.

"Like you?" Rand was amused. "They'll eat out of your hand."

And Miss Mattie had said, "Get into it, and I'll be there at four o'clock." So first came the wasp-waisted corset of white satin and whalebone, with its border of lace around the top finished off with the "perfect contentment" bow of satin. Molly's face was flushed as she laced the corset tight; her breath came shallowly, but it brought her breast high and forward in the line of the Grecian bend. Her waist was nineteen

inches, laced, but maybe Miss Mattie could let out the under-arm seams of the bodice.

Next came the drawers of sheerest muslin. Sweet-faced nuns in walled convent gardens had made the rows of tiny hand-run tucks, set in the rows of filmy insertion, whipped on the edging of real lace with invisible stitches. There would be lavender and mignonette in the walled garden, the sound of bells summoning the nuns to prayer. Molly slipped over her head the white flannel petticoat, soft as a kitten's ear, with its embroidered scallops. Flannel for warmth in cold drawing rooms, for protection from drafts.

Over the petticoat went the tilter of white silk shirred onto the half hoops of whalebone in the back, edged with real lace and tied around the waist with a white satin ribbon. Breathless, Molly slipped the skirt of the gown over her head. It was twenty-four rows of white Swiss Valenciennes shirred on white satin. The white satin pannier, looped twice over the tilter, was lined with point lace, edged with a ruching of the Swiss Valenciennes, and it fell into a square train.

But the bodice! It was sleeveless. Its décolletage was low and square. It was white satin, stiffly boned, but at the waist the tiny satin loops lacked an inch of meeting the satin-covered buttons. No buttonhook would bring loop and button together, no breathing in, but maybe Miss Mattie—

There was a knock at the church door and, the train over her arm, Molly opened the door to let Miss Mattie in with her bulging reticule, her busy eyes, and running tongue. The strings of Miss Mattie's rusty black bonnet secured both the bonnet and the chestnut-brown wig against a sudden gust. Twenty-five years now Miss Mattie had sewed the timber ladies, and she wasn't bowing to Maison Worth. She set her reticule down on the bed and, pursing the thin lips, she let her eyes run down the row of loops and buttons.

"You must've got a lot heavier, didn't you?" she said, and the quick color staining Molly's cheeks was answer enough. The busy eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles lit up as Miss Mattie stored the morsel away. "Yes, ma'am, Rand Bole's

Irish chambermaid is expecting, but don't ask me how I know!"

"Maybe if you'd lace in a little more——"

"I—it's tight now." Molly's flush deepened.

She took the bodice off, and Miss Mattie examined it inside and out. She sniffed, "Those French don't finish their seams just to suit me!" Yes, the underarm seams would have to be ripped, basted up, and then Molly could try the bodice on again. Miss Mattie said, "That's the trouble with ordering from Paris. Land knows what'll happen before you get it!" She sat in the chair by the window, ripping, and Molly sat on the bed, still in the white satin corset under the challis wrapper, while Miss Mattie improved the shining hour.

Well, the timber ladies and the oil ladies were still at it, tooth and nail! The latest was that the timber ladies had formed a club. They called it F.F.T.V. for First Families of Tuna Valley. Miss Mattie said, "No oil, and you can make up your mind to that!" Celestia Dwyer led the timber ladies—Ettie Dixon, that was, and many a cow Ettie Dixon had milked, anxious as she was to forget it! Poor Ettie never had landed Matt Dwyer, either, and if Molly asked Miss Mattie, Ettie never would land him short of heaven. It would have to be over Petty Preston's dead body, anyhow—Petty Dwyer, that was.

"Petty wants to be the whole show." Miss Mattie picked the severed threads from the white satin.

And poor Ettie had probably thought she was shut of her precious niece when Petty married Jim Preston, but no! The Prestons had come back from the grand tour in Europe to be with Papa at Aunt Ettie's, if you please. "And the women fight like Kilkenny cats, but don't ask me how I know!" Miss Mattie rolled the threads into a ball, popped the ball into her mouth, and ripped on. Celestia Dwyer could hardly expect to get the best of any quarrel with Petty, either, and land only knew why she tried, what with Matt Dwyer having full control of Celestia's estate and telling her how much she could spend and couldn't spend. Miss Mattie threaded a needle with basting thread. She said, "Let me see, where was I? Oh yes!"

Well, Cordelia Jones, the captain's lady with her Boston

accent, was the bellwether of the oil ladies. She and Melodia Spellacy. Those two worked hand in glove, and they were the only two women in town for whose parties Jacques Bedour deigned to cater, if you please! Miss Mattie pinned the bodice to her knee and began to baste a seam. She said, "Let me see, where was I? Oh yes!"

Well, Cordelia Jones had given Celestia Dwyer her come-uppance, and then some! It was at Mrs. Coon Frisbee's euchre party. The prize was a solid gold candelabrum that had cost three hundred dollars, if you please, and the timber ladies were playing cards for dear life, of course, but all the while looking down their noses, and Celestia Dwyer—Ettie Dixon, that was—remarked that there had *always* been Dixons in the valley. *Always!* And then, if you please, Cordelia Jones looked up from her cards to say with heartfelt sympathy, "Really? Oh, my dear, how dreadful for them!"

"It'll be a cold day before Celestia Dwyer rubs Cordelia Jones the wrong way again!" Miss Mattie rejoiced impartially in downfalls. "Celestia or anybody else."

Of course this ball to open the new Oil Exchange was a bitter pill for the timber ladies to swallow, what with the oil ladies sending off to Paris for their gowns and not getting so much for the money, either, if Molly asked Miss Mattie! Why, anybody could have run Cordelia Jones's gown up in two days' time, plain as it was! It was black velvet, from what Miss Mattie heard, and princess style with a square train. Melodia Spellacy's was white tarlatan, and Petty Preston's was blue taffeta with passementerie, and she was going to wear real moss roses from New York around the décolletage. Vulgar display, the timber ladies called it, and they said the oil ladies were *nouveaux riches*, but they didn't mean Petty, of course, because Petty was both timber and oil. Miss Mattie finished basting the seam and started to rip the other seam. She said, "Let me see, where was I? Oh yes, the ball!"

Well, the timber ladies would be gnashing their teeth before it was over. Whale's Germania Band was coming from Buffalo for the promenade concert, and there was to be a forty-piece

orchestra from New York for the dancing. Not only that, but Carlotta Patti, the great Patti's sister, was coming from New York to sing, and many a barrel of oil *that* would cost! It put that spindle-legged Jacques Bedour in a tight place, too, because the Archbolds were coming from the Creek, and Jacques didn't know whether to give the bed in which President Grant had slept at Hotel La Pierre to Carlotta Patti or to the Archbolds. Carlotta might be the great Patti's sister, but everybody said John Archbold would be the next president of Standard Oil and could have the great Patti herself sing for him twenty-four hours out of twenty-four if he felt like it. Who got President Grant's bed, though, would depend upon what Cordelia Jones said, because what *she* said was the law of the Medes and the Persians.

"I don't know what there is about her." Miss Mattie pursed her lips judicially. "She isn't what I'd call pretty, and if you ask me, she pads!"

The bodice was basted, and Miss Mattie said, "You better put the skirt on again and let me see how it goes together." She slipped the loops over the buttons with the buttonhook and stood back to gauge the effect with her head on one side, her lips pursed. Something was wrong. It was in Miss Mattie's eyes. Shrugging, Miss Mattie said, "But I don't s'pose you'd have any jewelry, would you?"

Molly turned to the marble-topped dresser. From the top drawer she took the purple velvet box. In her eyes was the shy pride of the cherished woman as she held it open for Miss Mattie's inspection. Miss Mattie's mouth dropped open until she looked like a gasping fish. The breath went out of her. Her running tongue was still. Molly said softly, "The man from Tiffany's brought them. Rand wanted me to have them."

"Oh, do put 'em on!" Miss Mattie found her tongue.

Molly stood there before the marble-topped dresser, a slight and shimmering figure in the gown from Maison Worth, the diamonds from Tiffany's, and with the delicate lace fan in her hands. Her eyes held Miss Mattie's, anxiously questioning. Outside a pistol barked, there was the sound of running feet

along the boardwalks, hoarse shouts and drunken laughter, but in the tiny bedroom was the faint scent of lavender and mignonette, anxious silence, as Molly waited for Miss Mattie's approval.

And Miss Mattie laughed. It was a shrill, high cackle that brought tears to Miss Mattie's eyes, and she had to hold her sides. It was minutes before she could say, "Petty Preston will loathe the ground you walk on and begrudge the air you breathe! Her and her corals!" Miss Mattie was off again.

"Petty Preston?" Molly's hands tightened on the fan.

Miss Mattie stopped the shrill cackling to stare at her. Her eyes filled with a happy light with this incredulous glimpse of a fallow field. She said, "You mean you don't know about Petty Preston and—"

"You're the only woman I—I've talked to. You and my dancing teacher."

"And Petty Preston is the girl Rand Bole wanted!" Miss Mattie couldn't wait. "He was mad about her. She could have had him just like that!" Miss Mattie snapped her fingers. "And she took Jim Preston!"

The ivory sticks of the fan snapped in Molly's hands. Miss Mattie's eyes held hers as a snake holds a charmed bird. Miss Mattie walked up to her to tap the satin bodice with a thimble finger.

"And you know that redheaded girl, Rose? The one that wears the green habit and rides the Arabian mare and stays at Madam Stoddard's, where the private girls stay? Do you know whose girl she is? She's Jim Preston's girl, that's who she is! Leastwise, he's the one that pays her livery bills, but don't ask me how I know. Yes, ma'am, if Petty Preston ever wears diamonds, it won't be Jim Preston that buys 'em, and don't tell me Rand Bole isn't aiming to show her what she missed!"

The fan slipped from Molly's fingers. Her hands went behind her to grip the marble ledge of the dresser. Miss Mattie stuffed her tape measure and thread and thimble and scissors into the bulging reticule. She straightened the rusty bonnet and chestnut-brown wig, tightened the bonnet strings under her chin.

At the door she stopped to let her eyes run over Molly once more, her head cocked critically to one side. She said, "You look kind of peaked for white. Maybe you should've got something with a little color to it."

She was gone then. Molly's hands held to the marble ledge behind her as if they would never loosen, and as she stood there, frozen, voices rose in violent argument in the office behind the partition. One of them was Rand's. And the other voice—

"Who do you think you are, Bole?" It was a contemptuous drawl. "God Almighty? Not to me. I knew you on the Creek, and your father before you. You may be the hell of a man with women, and you may make it pay, but you can't tell me——"

There was the sound of scuffling feet, the sound of a door opening and slamming. Then Molly heard Rand's step coming toward her. He stood there in the doorway of the tiny bedroom, white to the eyes with fury. His battered oil-soaked hat was arrogantly aslant on the crisp growth of sandy hair. His oil-soaked jeans were tucked into the custom-made field boots of softest leather, mud-caked and a size too large. He held a pen and a bottle of ink in one hand, a paper in the other.

"Sign this!" He looked at her, unseeing. "It puts Music Mountain in my name. Damn them, I'll show them who's the man in this field, and by God, I'll ram it down their throats until they crawl to me on their bellies!"

The ink and pen and the paper were on the marble-topped dresser beside her as Rand paced the tiny bedroom in the grip of fury. Molly's hands clung to the marble edge, and as she stood there she felt the first quickening of their child within her. Beads of cold sweat stood out on her forehead. A wave of nausea swept over her.

"I—I can't sign it, Rand." Her hands on the ledge were growing numb.

Rand stopped in his tracks to stare at her. A thunderous frown lined his forehead. He saw her. His eyes, blazing, stripped her of the lace and diamonds, seared through to the quivering flesh. She couldn't sign it? And why not? Did she,

in God's name, believe that her few paltry dollars were Lennon Oil? *Lennon Oil was Rand Bole!* And no man alive would hold the whip hand over him.

"And no Irish chambermaid from the Bannon House!" The words cut around her like a whip. His face was livid, wrung. "You'll sign it, or I'll walk out."

In it was full knowledge of her helplessness. This wasn't Rand. This couldn't be Rand, this man who stood revealed before her, obsessed and ruthless, a law unto himself. Her hold on the ledge was slipping.

"Sign this, I tell you!" He stood over her.

The floor dipped, her hands relaxed on the ledge, her knees gave way, and with a rustle of satin and lace, the shimmer of diamonds, she slipped to the floor and oblivion beside the broken fan.

It was dark when she opened her eyes on the bed. Around her was the faint scent of lavender and mignonette. Rand was gone. In the glare of lights from the street she could see the bottle of ink on the marble-topped dresser, the pen and the paper, unsigned. Rand was gone, but Rand would come back.

Yes . . . Rand would come back.

THE WHITE SATIN TRAIN WAS OVER MOLLY'S ARM.

The mink dolman hung loose from her shoulders. The diamonds caught the light of the street lamps. There was a red carpet that formed a lane through the gaping crowd, and a canopy overhead. One gloved hand was on Rand's arm, but it was ice-cold. The pupils of her eyes were darkly distended, and under the satin bodice her heart labored.

A door swung wide upon light and warmth, a soft carpet, deep chairs of tufted leather, and from the pit came the roll of drums and crash of cymbals as the band played for the promenade. Then she was alone. The stairway led from the lounge to the balcony from which visitors would look down into the pit while oil was bought and sold, fortunes were made and lost. She stood for a minute with one hand on the balcony railing, looking down.

The band in crimson and gold braid was on a dais across one end of the pit. The bull ring would be installed tomorrow, but the indicator, which would register the price of oil as it changed hands, was on the wall. Across the floor white canvas had been stretched taut for dancing. Fan-shaped gas flames in the chandelier played upon jewels and flowers, the rainbow hues of gowns. Upward floated gay voices and laughter. Guests had come from the Creek, from Petroleum Center, from Titusville and Oil City; a closely knit clique, they were, and this was reunion. Laughter and lace!

Molly turned from the railing. Opening off the balcony were the offices of the major oil companies, and the front suite looking down upon Main Street was Rand's. On the door in gold

leaf were the words: Lennon Oil Company. Rand Bole, President. And for the night the offices of the Exchange clearing-house had been turned into powder rooms for the ladies. Tomorrow clerks on high stools would bend over ledgers, recording sales, watching Ruin stalk and Fortune smile, but tonight the walls were lined with mirrors, beruffled dressing tables at which ladies, lately from the mud and shanties and the black swirl of the Creek, put last touches to toilettes, dabbing last whiffs of scent from jeweled boxes, smoothing long white gloves of French kid.

Through the doorway came laughter, gay chatter. The laughter and chatter died abruptly as Molly stood there, hesitating in the doorway. In the hush the ladies were suddenly preoccupied with the mirrors. Molly saw only looped panniers and trains and white backs. The mirrors beside her were quickly blank. In her mirror she saw covert glances from under lashes taking her measure. Then they turned eyes from her to each other, eyebrows went up, and the raised eyebrows said, "My dear, she came! And a pretty pass, isn't it?"

As if by magic, the room emptied with a rustle of trains, and there were only the two of them left: Molly and the one in the gown of blue satin and passementerie, with its décolletage outlined by moss roses. She had a heart-shaped face with an elfin prettiness, that other one, and eyes as blue as the sea in the sun, a cascade of shining curls. Their eyes met in the mirror, and then Petty was stripping corals from her ears and throat and slim arms. She tossed the corals into a scattered heap on the dressing table, picked up her train, and with a toss of the shining curls she was gone.

Molly stood alone, a slight figure in white satin and Swiss Valenciennes, with the nosegay of white violets caught to one bracelet. Through the doorway came the high clear trill of an aria. Her hands gripped the scent box and fan. For one last minute she shut her eyes and breathed deep.

"You are faint, madam?" A curious maid was at her elbow with smelling salts.

"Oh no . . . no. I'm very well." She picked up her train.

The train rustled behind her on the staircase. One hand on the banister stayed her. She kept her head high. But one hand was on Rand's arm again then, and gallant gentlemen bowed over the other hand. They straightened to search with contained eyes among the rainbow hues of the gowns, but their ladies were preoccupied for the moment. Later, perhaps? They said it smoothly.

Rand's jaw line hardened. There was an intent look in his eyes. Molly's hand on his arm was cold, and her facial muscles, set in the shape of a smile, ached. Around them was the swirl of laughter and lace, gay greetings, mixed scents. They were an island in a frothing, flashing sea. The room whirled before Molly's eyes. The lights blurred. She was faint.

"Rand," she said, "could I—is there a chair?"

Rand stood beside her chair, his jaw line taut, and with that intent look in his eyes. The promenade went on; the band played. Molly held the scent box and fan tight in her lap, tasting the tears in her throat. She barely heard Rand's voice when he said, "Molly, this is Captain Luke Jones." She looked up to see a man with a white streak in his hair bowing low. She looked into steady, opaque eyes. She caught a flicker of surprise in them, quickly covered, and almost as a continuation of it the captain touched the arm of a lady in a black velvet gown as he said smoothly, "My dear, do you know Rand Bole's bride?"

She turned smiling from the covey of hushed satellites. Her hair was powdered with gold dust, and circles of rubies glowed warm and deep on her arms. Molly looked up to meet gray eyes, lively and humorous and penetrating. . . . Why, they were the eyes of the woman on the other side of Buckthorn on the plank across the river of mud! There was quick recognition in them, and then a lady's warm smile hailed another lady and a kindred spirit well met! Cordelia Jones's arm around her waist was proprietary. Cordelia Jones said in the accents of Beacon Hill, "Melodia, my dear, this is Rand Bole's bride. And, Anne . . . Anne Archbold! Oh, there you are! You must know

our other bride. And, Petty! You brides must know each other."

"Indeed we must!" Petty's voice was childlike, breathless. "Rand's father was a rafter for Papa on the Creek."

"Oh, but I have a better claim!" Melodia Spellacy linked an arm in Molly's. "The Spellacy shanty was on the Bole farm, Petty dear!"

Molly was caught in the swirl then. She was part of it, dancing in the royal set with Captain Jones. It was "Ariel," a quadrille lancers, and the captain said, "What! You haven't heard of Abby? But how do you sleep at night? I wake in the dark to think of Rockefeller, but I remember the pocket in Abby's petticoat and drop back to sleep." She danced with Coon Frisbee, the nimblest man in the set with a vast pride in the great diamond that flashed on the little finger of his left hand. He boomed, "They can't keep us mule skimmers down, can they?" She danced with Sam Spellacy, a rollicking bear of an Irishman. Grinning, he groaned, "So Rand pulled a sleeper on us! Lady, when I think I could have danced in your shoes for twenty-eight thousand dollars and an eighth of the oil!"

The orchestra swung into a waltz. It was "The Bells of Corneville," and Molly was dancing with Jim Preston, a young blade with a blond mustache and intimate eyes. He said, "We're bound to be great friends. Rand tells me this waltz will always be his and my wife's." And after him came John Archbold, whose shy, scholarly exterior belied the inner yeast. With equal ease he could restore a lady's handkerchief or hurl a sledge across the street. He said shyly, "Do you mind if I concentrate? I might step on you, and Lennon Oil is the Standard's biggest producer in the field!" He gave way to General Hauck, a man with gray hair and a soldier's shoulders, and giving way, he said, "So you are a dancing man, General!"

"Only under extreme provocation!" The general bowed to Molly. "But we have other things in common, John. We are the only two men here whose knees don't knock together at the thought of Rockefeller."

Dancing the polka, the general said, "We sound brave, John and I, but Rockefeller has already taken him over, and I'm an engineer with no oil to sell— Oh, did I step on you?"

"I—I did it." Molly looked down. She caught the step, and then, "Rand has oil to sell."

"Lennon Oil, isn't it?" The general was informed. He shook his head. "I doubt if you and Rockefeller will ever be friends."

"Oh, but I mean him no real harm, General!"

"Are you sure of it?" The general was dubious. "He owns the tanks that store your oil. He owns the pipeline that transports it to the railroad. He holds the whip hand over the railroad. The refineries that buy your oil are dropping like ripe plums into his hat. Someday he may say, 'No more diamonds, Mrs. Bole!'"

"Are you sure of it?" Molly was unafraid. "He doesn't produce the oil that buys them."

"Too hazardous, dear lady!" The general smiled, dancing. "It takes a gambler to produce oil, and the kind that only ten-cent oil will stop."

"He'd better be nice to me." Molly tossed her head. "Rand might say, 'No more oil, Mr. Rockefeller!'"

"And then what would Rand do with his oil?" the general wondered.

"I—why, I don't know!" Molly missed the step again.

"Ten cents a barrel won't buy diamonds, dear lady." The general shook his head again. "At least not for you."

Over the dancers' heads Molly's eyes went to the indicator on the wall. It seemed to move and, moving, to cast a shadow over the pit that dimmed the lights and dulled the sparkle of the jewels, gave the music a somber note, the laughter a ring of bravado. But they danced on.

The music stopped. Molly opened her fan. The general tamped his forehead with his handkerchief. He said, "Warm, isn't it?" Molly's eyes came back to him. An engineer—with no oil to sell? She said, "Are you a visitor, General?"

"From New York—by special invitation." The general sur-

veyed the promenade. "But my offices would stand for an open break with Rockefeller, and his shadow is long here."

"Have you talked with Rand?" Molly said, fanning, and the general hesitated, tamping.

"I've talked with you," he said bluntly then.

"You—you'd have to talk with Rand."

"Is it a suggestion?" Over the fan the general's eyes met hers.

"Oh no!" Molly looked down. She looked up then to say, "But I—I think he wants me to wear diamonds."

"How could I doubt it?" The general smiled. "And I'll keep it in mind."

She saw him once more at the buffet table along the balcony on which gold candelabra held flaming candles high to be reflected in silver and crystal and to play upon boned turkey with truffles, pyramids of jellied quail, roast pig, and larded pheasants.

"Can't Mr. Rockefeller and I both dine on quail, General?" Molly was wistful.

"At ten cents a barrel?" The general studied the plate in his hand. "Madam, I doubt it. And too bad, isn't it? The quail is very nice."

"Poor Mr. Rockefeller!" Molly sighed for him. "And I meant him no real harm."

"Madam"—the general's eyes twinkled—"Mr. Rockefeller sighs more convincingly for himself."

But at the table they had come to Jacques Bedour's meringue imperial, his charlotte madronne, and macédoine de fruits, when the roll of drums came from the pit, the crash of cymbals, and the orchestra swung into the measured strains of the wedding march from *Tannhäuser*. In the sudden hush a door opened off the balcony, and through it came Jacques Bedour himself, bearing aloft a tiered cake, atop it a derrick of spun sugar. And beside the derrick Jacques had hastily improvised. On one side stood a bisque figurine with a filmy veil floating from its head, and on the other side the groom.

"I cut the bride's veil from my dress." It was Melodia Spel-lacy's Irish lilt.

"And do see the groom's black velvet tails!" It was Cordelia Jones's accent.

And there were four hands on the knife that cut the cake: Molly's and Petty's, Jim Preston's and Rand's. As the hands pressed down on the knife, as champagne corks popped and goblets went high in a toast to long life and all gushers, the violins took over, while from the pit Carlotta Patti's voice soared full and true:

*"I sent thee late a rosy wreath
Not so much honoring thee,
As with the thought that there my rose
Could not withered be."*

Afterward the bisque figurine with the veil stood on the marble-topped bureau in the little bedroom in the Baptist church. Molly and Petty had divided the figurines for souvenirs, and Petty said, "I'll take the groom." The coat of Rand's tails lay over the foot of the bed. At the bureau he slipped his white tie and unfastened his collar. His face was flushed, and his eyes were absent. Still in the gown from Maison Worth, Molly sat on the edge of the bed, smoothing a white glove. Inside it was the dance program on which General Herman Hauck had written his name opposite "Bismarck," a polka and schottische by Neibig.

"Rand," she said, "what is a sleeper?"

"A plugged well," Rand said absently.

"A good well?"

"A good well plugged for future reference."

"Was—was No. 6 a sleeper?" Molly smoothed the other glove.

She saw Rand's face close in the mirror, his eyes come to rest on her reflection in the glass, and there was that intent look in them. He said, "Why do you ask?"

"You didn't want to marry me, did you?" Molly twisted the gloves.

"I married you, didn't I?" Rand's eyes, intent, held her reflection. "And you are Mrs. Rand Bole, aren't you?"

"And you—are the president—of Lennon Oil."

Rand turned from the bureau to face her. It was the other one of him, standing there. The one with the whip.

"The president of Lennon Oil and your obedient servant!" His eyes were hard. "A fair enough trade, isn't it?"

But as he stood there looking at her while the pulse pounded in her temple and at the base of her throat, his eyes softened as if one of him had laid a restraining hand on the shoulder of the other one. Then Rand was on his knees beside her, his arms around her waist, his face pressed against her breast.

"Molly, don't leave me!" His arms tightened around her. "*Don't ever leave me.*"

RAND WALKED THE FLOOR OF HIS OFFICE, HIS HANDS clenched in his pockets, his forehead lined. The Exchange had opened, and the indicator on the wall still said, "No change in price." And damn it all, oil had been booming! Dry holes had been drilled in Stark and Potter and Warren counties. They bounded the field, didn't they? Standard Oil's forest of tanks was loaded to the gills with oil, held there in storage by the producers for the three-dollar price to come, and just beyond Rockefeller's reach. Now let Rockefeller holler for oil and watch John Archbold sweat!

Walking, Rand turned harried eyes to the safe in the corner. In it were certificates of ownership for a million barrels of oil in storage in those tanks, awaiting his word. But this morning Charlie Todd, his telegrapher, sat in his shirt sleeves in the alcove off the office at a suddenly quiet instrument. Charlie's coat was over the back of his chair. His vest hung open. The green shade was pushed high on his forehead as Charlie studied the *Oil City Derrick*. Charlie was playing the market in the bucket shop next door. All of them were playing it: doctor and lawyer, harlot and pimp, waitress and livery-stable tout, buying oil futures. The field had been bounded, and oil was going sky high!

The instrument began to click. Rand stopped in his tracks as Charlie cocked an ear.

"Two hundred thousand at Titusville, sir. No change in price. Still \$1.62½."

"What the hell's up?" Rand stood rigid.

"Little breather, sir." Charlie was confident, but in the pit

downstairs, in the lounge, was an ominous quiet. They were holding off down there, waiting. A chill gripped Rand as his mind flew to the wildcat well the Union Oil crowd had put down on the Seth Goodwin farm at Cherry Grove in Warren County a month ago. Damn it, the derrick had been torn down, the well plugged tighter than a drum. Every scout in the field had reported it dry as dust. Willie Maguire had scouted it for Rand. Walking, Rand thought, "Damn the fat fool! Why didn't I put a man on it?" Christ! The Cherry Grove wildcat couldn't be a sleeper to give the Union Oil crowd time to get set on the short side of the market, could it? Taylor and Satterfield . . . Were they cutting loose now? A well at Cherry Grove would extend the field by thirty miles and break the market wide open. A sleeper? Hell, no!

Rand's eyes came to rest on the safe. He was a member of four exchanges: Bradford, Titusville, Oil City, and Pittsburgh. Given a twenty-minute start, he could unload. He had a man waiting on the floor of each Exchange. Damn them, they drilled on these fools, while Rockefeller sat back, waiting to buy cheap oil in a glutted market. Walking, Rand stopped at the desk to look down at a slip of paper on it. On the slip of paper were only the numbers "200,000." It was from Perkins, the furtive-eyed clerk in the Exchange clearinghouse, who was in his pay. It meant that Matt Dwyer had bought two hundred thousand barrels of oil yesterday again. Figures raced through Rand's head. Dwyer was long on the market downstairs to the tune of 750,000 barrels.

It could mean much—or nothing. Dwyer—damn him!—could have sold at Titusville or Oil City or New York even as he bought downstairs. He could be stepping out for the rise, or he could stand clean as a whistle, without a barrel of oil to his name, buying here to lead 'em on, feeding it out on other exchanges, until the price was high and the market top-heavy. Then Dwyer would raid it, selling short. Drops of sweat stood out on Rand's forehead. He jerked his tie loose, unbuttoned his collar and shirtband, walking again. The instrument clicked, and Charlie bent over it.

"Slipping, sir!" Charlie sat tense. "Two hundred thousand at Oil City at \$1.60!"

The sweat trickled down the sides of Rand's face as he walked. He ran his hands through his hair, and his eyes turned to the safe as his mind played with the thought of Union Oil's wildcat. The Seth Goodwin farm at Cherry Grove in Warren County . . . Hell, dry holes had been drilled all around it! The instrument clicked. Two hundred thousand at Titusville, and at \$1.57½. God damn it, *something was up!* Another click, and Charlie sat back, grinning.

"She's coming back, sir! Two hundred thousand at New York and three hundred thousand downstairs at \$1.60!"

Rand mopped his forehead and face as the clicking went on, but it was over. Oil had hit \$1.62½ again, by God. A little breather, that was all; a breather to absorb the pikers. He stood at a window looking down into Main Street as he buttoned his shirtband and collar, tied his tie. He had sleepers on the brain!

Main Street was a cobblestoned thoroughfare now; Main Street and Congress Street. Bradford was the oil metropolis of the world. The market was governed by Bradford's production figures; the market and ship charters to Liverpool, London, Antwerp, and Bremen. Down Main Street came Standard Oil's gleaming white tank wagon, drawn by sleek fat horses. It had taken the place of Kerosene Jack, who was his own horse, trundling his cart with a couple of drums of kerosene in it from house to house, bawling out: "Kerosene . . . kerosene!" while women came from kitchens with oilcans to be filled. Kerosene Jack had had to yield to the white tank wagon and, yielding, he'd died of a broken heart. Rockefeller didn't overlook a trick. But the field had been bounded. Now let Rockefeller sit back, waiting for cheap oil!

"One sixty-five, sir!" It was noon, and Charlie rolled down his shirt sleeves, ripped off the green shade, and got into his coat. "Two hundred thousand downstairs."

"She'll hit three dollars, Charlie." Rand dropped into the swivel chair.

He walked the floor of the office, waiting for Charlie to come back from lunch. It was a handsome office. Under the great mahogany desk and swivel chair was a soft-piled carpet. There were deep chairs of tufted leather and a couch. On the walls hung framed pictures of wells on Music Mountain, their derricks lacing the sky. There, too, hung a picture of Duchess, the queen of his racing string. It had been taken with her jockey in front of the judges' stand at Saratoga, and the Duchess, carefully blanketed, wore the wreath of flowers with arch-necked pride. On the desk stood a picture of Corporal, his prize pointer out of Bouncing Bet by Gustav.

The door opened. Charlie was back. He laid a slip of paper on Rand's desk, watching Rand's face like a hawk. Rand picked it up, looked at it without a twitch of a facial muscle. Part of Charlie's offices was to lunch every day at Sampson's Grill across the street on the stool next to Perkins, the furtive-eyed clerk in the clearinghouse, and sometime during lunch Perkins dropped the slip of paper into Charlie's coat pocket. Rand whistled softly through his teeth. The number "2" meant that Dwyer was doubling on the rise. Dwyer must be stepping out, and—damn him!—he was a legend in the lounge downstairs. "What's Dwyer doing, I wonder?" they asked each other. "Anybody heard him say?"

"One sixty-eight, sir!" The instrument was hot now, and the shouting began on the floor downstairs. "They're coming in at Pittsburgh. She's running away now, sir!"

Rand leaned back in his chair, his hands locked behind his head, his feet crossed on the desk, and his eyes went to the safe. Yawning, he said, "She'll hit three dollars, Charlie!" Sell at \$1.68? Not by a damned sight! The squeeze was on, and the shoe pinched on the other foot now.

The door opened, and Moffat, his stoop-shouldered chief clerk, approached the desk timidly.

"A man to see you, sir." Moffat was apologetic. "I tried to shake him, but he's bound I'm to tell you it's Simon."

Simon! Rand was out of his chair, and Simon, on Moffat's heels, stood there in the doorway. Rand put his arms around

Simon and swung him off his feet. He clapped Simon on the back. He stood off and, holding Simon away from him by the shoulders, let his eyes run over him. It was Simon, all right! The dusty derby rode Simon's ears. The frock coat was green along the seams. There were the shrewd, kindly eyes beneath the bushy brows, betraying the eternal war between Simon's heart and his talent. The side whiskers still kept Simon's head from slipping through the high stock collar, but there were scattered white hairs in them now, and his neck had shrunk a little more within the wide confines of the collar and cravat.

Rand let go of Simon to take a bill from his pocket. He laid it on the desk between them, and Simon's eyes caressed it.

"Simon," Rand said, "my ten to your one, that's the same damned getup you wore when I was a kid on the Creek!"

Simon's face fell. He opened the skirt of his coat to dig deep in a pocket of his pants. His hand came up with the worn, string-gathered pouch. From the pouch Simon painfully extracted a half dollar. He said, "You win half, Rand." He laid the coin on the desk for Rand to pocket gleefully with the bill and shrugged.

"The coat, it is the same, Rand." Simon sighed and then brightened in loving memory of good merchandise. "But the pants, they wore me out three seats!"

"Simon," Rand wondered, "did you ever hear of a man by the name of Rockefeller?"

"Rockefeller?" Simon pondered it, his head cocked to one side. "Sure! I read about him in the paper. He is in kerosene, no? And it goes good with him, hein?"

"Simon"—Rand sat with one leg over the corner of his desk, his hands in his pockets—"I wonder which would trim the other in a deal, you or Rockefeller?"

"Any time Mr. Rockefeller wants we should get together, me and him!" Simon shrugged, palms up, and then as he looked at Rand the kindly eyes clouded over. "But you, Rand! It goes hard with you, no? The son was born dead, yes? And it is not good for a man to be without a son."

Simon stood there mourning it, and then slowly the clouds

vanished. "But you have yet the good wife, Rand, and a man can always try again, yes?" His thumb poked Rand in the ribs.

"Simon, never underrate me!" Rand's thumb returned Simon's poke, and his right eyelid drooped in a wink. "I've already made visible progress in the matter, man!"

"Heh, heh, heh!" Simon chortled with glee. "No grass grows under your feet, yes? And you have built a fine house, no?"

Rand picked up his hat. He linked an arm in Simon's, dragged Simon through the outer office, where clerks on high stools looked up to wonder. He dragged Simon along the balcony while racing telegraph instruments clicked and shouts came from the pit. He dragged Simon down the stairs and through the lounge.

They climbed onto the seat of Simon's covered wagon behind the sleek prancing team, and with the clusters of tin pans jingling, the silver bells tinkling, they turned into Congress Street. They passed a team of bobtailed steppers in silver-mounted harness. On the box of the victoria sat a liveried coachman, and in the victoria was Mrs. Coon Frisbee, with the breeze in the ruffles of her parasol. Her eyes widened as they passed, and Rand lifted his hat with a flourish and a bland smile.

"Simon," he said, "I can remember when I wanted to be a peddler like you. And when I came to our house on the Creek I was going to give Ma the whole bolt of silk free of charge!"

"Your ma, she liked things nice." Simon winced, remembering.

They came to the fountain and the two stone deer. Rand said, "Matt Dwyer lives there, Simon." Simon craned his seamed neck to take shrewd inventory of the two stone pillars, the drive winding from them under the porte-cochere, the broad veranda.

"Always it goes good with Matt Dwyer, yes?" Simon concluded.

"It goes good with him, yes!" Rand's jaw line hardened.

"To some it gives always to win, and why this is so, I dunno," Simon reflected to the jingle of his pans and the tinkle of his

bells. "The great Jehovah, mebbe He knows. You say so, Rand?"

"That was Ma that said so, Simon," Rand said. "Ma and Brother Lanz!"

The September sun, shifting through arched maples, was warm upon them. The sleek coats of the horses darkened with sweat. From the hills came the scream of saws and echoing chug of engines.

"Myself, I dunno." Simon shrugged. "I know only the carpets and curtains, the dishes and pans."

"Turn here, Simon," Rand said, and Simon turned under a great stone arch between stone pillars into a graveled drive winding gently upward through a wooded park. Frost had tinged the maples to warm reds and yellows against the green of hemlocks. A turn in the drive revealed on the crest the gleaming white outlines of a sprawling frame mansion with two decks of verandas supported by chaste Doric pillars. With a glint in his eye Rand waited for Simon's reaction. Simon's bushy eyebrows drew together.

"It comes high to be warm in such a house when snow is here, no?" Simon said.

"A ton of coal a day, Simon!" Rand chuckled.

Simon's wagon waited under the porte-cochere as Rand threw the great doors wide. He said, "Welcome to Bole Hall, Simon!" Simon stood there in the entrance hall, and the bushy eyebrows drew closer together. Overhead was a stained glass roof that filtered the light from above. There was a curving marble staircase with ornate bronze railings supporting the balustrade. It soared upward to an arched mezzanine.

"Come on, Simon." Rand turned into the music room. Simon's eyes traveled over the ebony piano, the soaring pipes of the organ, the murals. "Come on, Simon," Rand urged, but Simon came to a wondering stop before the marble bust of Bach on a pedestal. He took the steel-rimmed spectacles from their case, perched them on the hooked nose, and regarded the bust over them.

"This one, Rand," he wondered. "How is he called?"

Rand's eyes came to focus on the bust, seeing it for the first time. He shook his head as he said, "Damned if I know, Simon. Must be in music, no?"

Simon lifted the bust from the pedestal and set it back. It was solid marble.

"Nice merchandise!"

Simon glanced at the copper-painted ceiling in the library, ran his hand down a tooled-leather wall. The library was English Renaissance, paneled from floor to ceiling in English oak. Here was a massive mantel of Rouge Royal, a Belgian marble. To the left and right of it were bookcases richly carved, and above these were windows of art glass representing scenes in English forests. One large Scotch carpet in Gobelin blue and English brown made a background for old English furniture—rare pieces covered in Gobelin verdure tapestry. Shaking his head, Simon dropped into a deep chair at one side of the mantel, dwarfed by it.

"You sit here to read in your book, Rand?" he said.

"Sit?" Rand dropped into a chair on the other side of the mantel. "Is that what a chair's for, Simon?" He leaned his head against the back of the chair and shut his eyes. "Not bad, eh?"

"A man, he grows tired, no?" Simon sighed, but rousing, Rand glanced at his watch. He said, "Come on, Simon."

The dining room was oval in shape, colonial in design. The woodwork was of Crotch Veneer mahogany. The floor was of Roman marble mosaic with border of greens and deep reds. A fire glowed in the fireplace. The mantel, the hearth, and facings were of Alps green, a French marble. Simon's eyes wandered over the baronial table and came to rest upon the crystal chandelier above it.

"Such a place a man should have to eat his borsht?" Simon shook his head, wondering.

Weariness was heavy upon him by the time they came to the drawing room, and the clouds were deep in his eyes. It was modeled from the period of Louis XV. The woodwork was in old ivory, with colorings in gold. The ceilings were in bas-

relief, representing sunrise and morning-glories. There were two French mantels, and their heavy ivory-and-gold consoles supported mirrors extending to the ceiling. Their facings and hearths were of Mexican rose onyx. Under Simon's dusty feet were soft Persian rugs in rose shadings over floors of inlaid wood. There were velvet hangings in soft Du Barry shades. The portieres were of this velvet with an overhanging stole of ivory silk embroidered with gold. Simon ran his hand over chairs tufted with satin.

"Nice merchandise!" As he stood there in the middle of the room, surveying it, a ray of hope penetrated the clouds. He said, brightening, "You got a good price, Rand?"

Rand's hilarious laugh rang out to echo back to him from the corners of the room. He clapped Simon on the back in sweet triumph. He said, "Simon, you're the man who wouldn't walk across the street to see what's at the bottom of a hole. Remember?"

Simon winced, remembering. He felt the velvet hangings between a finger and thumb, still wincing. "A man can still lose in oil, no?"

"You're damned right he can!" Rand chuckled. "And he can still win, Simon."

"This Rockefeller you name to me," Simon said as, leaning down, he felt a rug between finger and thumb, "he is a smart man, no?"

"Not too smart, Simon!" His hands in his pockets, Rand walked up and down the room. "He's another trembling penny pincher like you, Simon, so he has no oil for his refineries, and we've got him in a hole now."

Simon surveyed the room once more, wincing again, but standing there, he brightened slowly.

"Doch!" He drew a folded paper from an inside pocket of the frock coat. "From Warren County, I come this way, and Miz Seth Goodwin, which a rich uncle died on her this trip, she buys good. Yes, good she buys, hein?"

Simon peered at the paper through the steel-rimmed spectacles, his forehead furrowed, and his voice lingered blissfully

over each item as he read off, "Brussels carpet, best quality, ten rooms, price is no object. Lace curtains, twenty-six windows, upstairs and down, price is no object. Dishes, all new, even the kitchen—it's Haviland china—price is no object. Kettles and pans . . ."

Simon's voice droned blissfully on. He came to the end, looked up, and his jaw dropped. Where was Rand? Simon peered around him in that fine room over his spectacles. He peered into each separate corner. Rand wasn't there. He was alone in that room! Rand was gone. Simon heard his bells jangling, the galloping thud of his horses' hoofs, the loud jingle of his pans, the rumble of his wagon wheels. Rand was gone, and Rand had taken his wagon. Something went bad here. Panic crept upon Simon as he stood rooted. Sweat came out on him in a cold, damp mist. The paper shook in his hands. Something was wrong. He felt it in his bones, along his every nerve.

"Rand!" It was a woman's cry. There was anguish in it. It froze Simon to the marrow. "Rand!"

It echoed in the well of the staircase, and Simon's knees shook under him as he followed his ears to peer up the grand staircase. It was a girl—a dark-haired girl on the staircase, big with child. She clung with both hands to the curving balustrade, and with each faltering step she called, "Rand!" Simon stood frozen at the foot of the marble stairs, his eyes fixed on her, wringing his hands.

"Rand . . . *Rand!*"

"Oi!" Simon whimpered. "Oi!"

She came on, slow and faltering. Her eyes were wide and blank. She was out of her head. She reached the tenth step as Simon stood paralyzed, and stopped, swaying. Light filtered through the stained glass over her.

"Rand!" It was a broken whimper. Her hands on the balustrade relaxed, and then Simon was up the stairs, and she was a dead weight in his arms.

"Oi!" It burst from Simon's throat. "*Oi! Oi!*"

Sweat crawled his back. Her eyes were closed. Her face was dead white. Her arms hung limp. "Oi!" Simon held on. "Oi!"

Oil!" He heard the sound of running feet, and then a woman in starched calico was on the stairs beside him, and a covey of frightened maids huddled at the foot of the stairway. The woman took the girl from him into stout arms. It was Abby Sloan, and Simon's relief left him lightheaded even as Abby railed, "Where are your eyes, man? And is there lead in your boots? *Fetch me Rand Bole!*" With the girl in her arms she turned upon the frightened covey below. "And you! Is there no head among you? Twelve of you in this house to eat a man poor, and a woman dies in childbirth. *Fetch me a doctor!*"

Fetch me Rand Bole! SIMON LAID THE WHIP ALONG the blooded trotters' flanks. They reared, plunging, and came down. The buckboard hurtled down the winding drive, and gravel flew. The buckboard shot between the stone pillars on two wheels; the horses' shoes struck sparks from cobblestone; the wind flattened Simon's whiskers against his face. People on the sidewalks stopped in their tracks, staring; dogs scuttled to the curb; and, standing up, Simon brought the whip down again. His boots braced against the floor, he lay back on the reins for the turn into Main Street; the buckboard heeled over on two wheels, righted itself, and all Main Street raced with it.

Bartenders in white coats poured out of saloons, waitresses in aprons. Men rushed from offices and banks, shops and livery stables. Simon saw it—his team and wagon hitched to the rail in front of the Exchange. The buckboard careened to a stop beside his wagon and, flecked with foam from the horses' mouths, Simon leaped over a wheel. He wormed his way through the crowd that pushed and shoved toward the door of the Exchange and the bucket shop next door. The crowd closed in on him, barred his way. Simon ducked under flailing arms. His derby dropped, to be trampled underfoot, but he reached the door and slipped through it.

The lounge was empty, and from the pit came a frenzied roar like storm-driven surf breaking against rock. The roar rolled over him on the stairs, along the balcony, and there was madness in it. Clerks, white-faced, huddled together in Rand's outer office, whispering, but Moffat broke away to bar Simon's way. Moffat quavered, "You can't see Mr. Bole. The market's

active—he's at the wire." Simon brushed past him. Moffat clutched at Simon's sleeve, but Simon broke loose. His shaking hand grasped the doorknob. He turned it, but the door was locked. Beating against it with clenched fists, Simon shrilled, "Rand, it's me, Simon!" For answer there was only the steady click of the telegraph instrument and Rand's voice, taut and hard, saying, "Let 'em have a hundred thousand more at Titusville, Charlie!"

"Rand!" Simon beat against the door as Moffat gripped him by the coat collar, and the maddened roar from the pit drowned his voice. "*Rand!*" Simon kicked out at Moffat, beating on the door and yelling above the roar, "Rand, it's me, Simon!" The key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Rand stood there in the doorway. His collar and tie dangled loose; his shirtband had been ripped open. His hair stood up in peaks; sweat streaked his face. A nerve twitched in his cheek.

"Rand!" Simon wrung his hands, dancing. He screamed above the roar. "Rand, it's the good wife. Her time is here, and it goes bad. Rand, you hear me?"

"I hear you!" Rand's hand came up to take him by the black cravat and high stock collar. Rand shook him like a rat. Rand's voice was cold, deadly steel. "Simon, get away from me and stay away from me, or I'll break every bone in your body!"

The door slammed in Simon's face; the key turned in the lock. Simon beat against the door, shrilling, but Moffat had him by the coat collar and the seat of his pants. He shoved Simon, struggling, ahead of him to the outer door, heaved him onto the balcony, slammed the door, and locked it. Simon's yell, his clenched fists against the door were drowned in the roar from the pit.

And the balcony was packed now. Women gripped the railing until their knuckles showed white while their eyes clung to the indicator on the well below. Men brushed the backs of their hands across foreheads wet with sweat. They carried Simon along in the struggle for place at the railing, and the roar from the pit beat against his eardrums. Around the bull

ring below men battled for place, screaming. Their hats were gone, their coats. Their collars hung open. They snatched slips of paper from racing messengers while the telegraph instruments clicked like castanets to a mad whirling dervish.

The indicator dipped, and a moan rang along the balcony. It steadied, rose! The sigh of relief was like wind in tree branches. Hands on the railing relaxed. Along the balcony ran the word, "Dwyer . . . he's after 'em!" The indicator rose again. Cheers burst from dry throats; hats sailed into the air. It was over, and they were hunting cover, damn them! Dwyer had 'em where he wanted 'em now. He'd let 'em have it!

The indicator dipped, and the cheers died in their throats. It rose, and they breathed again. It dipped and dipped again. Beside Simon, a woman wearing a shepherdess hat saucily atilt on a cascade of shining curls, held tight to the railing. The indicator dipped again, and one hand went to her mouth. The indicator dipped, and she sobbed, "Oh no—no, *no!*"

Crushed against the railing, Simon stared down, unbelieving. They were mad, those men down there in the pit, fighting to the death. It was death Simon smelled; death riding the throbbing roar that surged up from the pit. He felt it in his bones, along his every nerve. He stumbled down the stairs and into the street. Hands clutched at him from the crowd. Voices beat against his ears. "What's up, man? For God's sake, what's happened?"

"Myself, I dunno." Shrugging, palms up, Simon wormed his way to the shining buckboard, hatless.

Hunched in the buckboard with the sweat coming out on him, cold and crawling, he kept his eyes riveted to the door. Men lurched through it, white and drawn as if from the rack, their shoulders slumped. Through the crowd ran the word, "A raid! Bole and Taylor and Satterfield—they broke through!" They cursed Bole; they cursed Taylor and Satterfield. They cursed oil, and they cursed the Exchange.

"Burn it down! Put a torch to it!"

The door opened, and the crowd was suddenly still as a young man with a blond mustache staggered to the curb as if

in sleep. His eyes were blank. He was hatless; his collar and tie hung loose. He reached the curb and, weaving there on his feet, retching, he vomited into the gutter. The hush deepened. In the street a hound-dog sat back on his haunches and threw up his head in a long mournful howl. Simon turned his head away, and when he looked again the young man was gone. The crowd stood stunned as through it ran the word he left behind him.

"Cherry Grove! Union Oil hit a three-thousand-barrel well at Cherry Grove! It's on the wire!"

There was a commotion at the door of the Exchange, a hoarse shout: "Make way there. . . . *Make way!*" The crowd swayed backward, and through the door men strained. They carried something on a shutter through the hushed and staring crowd. The shutter passed within reach of Simon's hand, and on it lay Matt Dwyer. Yes, it was Matt Dwyer. He was alive. His facial muscles writhed, his head turned from side to side, but his body on the shutter was oddly still. They stopped a team and wagon, loaded the burdened shutter into the wagon; a man with a white streak in his hair got in beside the shutter, and as the wagon turned into Congress Street the loud clang of a gong from inside the Exchange cut the pall like a burst of cannon. The market had closed for the day.

Shivering in the buckboard, Simon turned his eyes again to the door of the Exchange. The sun had begun to drop behind the hills; a cold wind swept through the valley, driving sere leaves before it, and in it was the promise of frost. The crowd huddled close, white-faced and stunned as the Exchange door opened. Rand stood there on the steps, his hat at a jaunty angle, oblivious to the stricken silence. They made a path for him, and as he came on, the hound-dog detached himself from the throng to follow at Rand's heels, his tail wagging.

They came to the curb, Rand and the dog. Rand stood there, looking from Simon's team and wagon with the clinging clusters of pans to Simon hunched in the gleaming buckboard behind the slim-legged trotters.

"Oh no, you don't, Simon!" Rand wagged an admonishing

finger. There was a mad light in his eyes. "Not by a damned sight, man! You can't trim me in a trade."

"Rand, it's the good wife!" Simon clambered down from the buckboard to stand wringing his hands. "It gives the doctor bad trouble and——"

One of his hands was in Rand's, and to his agonized bewilderment Rand stood there, pumping it up and down.

"Simon," he said, "don't fail to give my best regards to Mrs. Seth Goodwin, will you? A beauteous creature of exemplary character——"

"Rand, come quick, the doctor says, if——"

"—and infinite charm, Simon! Tell her she has her own niche in Rand Bole's heart forever, will you?"

He dropped Simon's hand, climbed into the buckboard, and picked up the reins. He grinned at Simon, and then his eyes lit on the hound-dog, on his haunches beside a wheel, looking up at Rand and wagging his tail. Rand patted a place on the seat of the buckboard beside him.

"Come on, Tige!" he said. "Jump, boy!"

The dog drew back, set himself, and leaped over the wheel to the seat as if he were shot out of a gun, and sat there on his haunches, triumphant, as Rand turned into Congress Street, his hat at that jaunty angle. The trotters clipped past the stone deer beside the fountain and, looking straight ahead between their ears, Rand whistled through his teeth. With one hand he scratched the dun-colored hound-dog behind the ears.

"You've struck it rich, Tige," he said. "A soft berth for you, boy, and fancy company!"

The trotters swung between the stone pillars and up the winding drive. A stableboy waited under the porte-cochere to take the horses over, and the hound-dog was at Rand's heels as he strode across the veranda. Rand opened a door and, with the dog at his heels, stepped into the tense stillness of the entrance hall. There was only the echo of a slow step in the well of the staircase and, looking up, Rand saw young Dr. Olds coming down the marble steps.

The doctor's coat was over his arm. His shirt sleeves were

rolled high. His collar and tie hung loose; his shirtband gaped open. His face was white and drawn, and sweat glistened there in the light filtering through stained glass. He came to the bottom of the staircase and set down his bag to roll his sleeves down as his eyes came to slow focus upon Rand.

"Your second son was born dead." He spoke in a tired monotone. "And I came within a hair's breadth of losing your wife this time." He wriggled wearily into his coat, picked up his bag, and took his hat from an anxious maid. At the door he turned to run tired eyes over Rand. "*Good God, how she called for you.*"

Rand's step echoed on the marble staircase. His hat was still at that jaunty angle, and the dog was at his heels. He opened a door to step into a bedroom with a frieze of cupids in plaster relief. The bed was up three steps on a dais. Its silken canopy had been pushed back, and, a slight mound under the silken coverlet, Molly slept. The dark lashes swept wan cheeks. The blue-black hair spread across a down pillow. Her hands, relaxed against the coverlet, were waxen, as if death retreated slowly. Abby stood at a window, her broad back to the room, and her smothered sobbing was the only sound in it.

Rand turned from the bed to meet Abby's red-rimmed eyes, and from them sparks spat out at him through Abby's tears, but her voice was hushed and sibilant when she said, "You're a disgrace to any Bole that ever lived, and I guess mebbe you know what I mean!" Rand stood there with his hands in his pockets, his hat at the jaunty angle, looking down at the dog, taking wondering inventory of the dun color, the lop ears, the liquid melting eyes, the lolling tongue. Yes, sir, a dead ringer for Tige, by God! His eyes, deep in his head but with the mad light in them, turned from the dog to Abby, hardening.

"A Bole, am I?" He wagged the admonishing finger at her. "A Bole, eh? But they didn't get me this time, Abby. No, they didn't get me this time. *I—got—them.*"

He sat again in the library that night, alone and with the nerve still twitching in his cheek; alone but for the dog snoozing on the soft hearthrug in the warmth of the fire. Over Bole Hall

was an anxious hush as servants tiptoed, speaking in whispers. Now and again Rand leaned over to scratch Tige behind the ears, and, rousing, Tige licked his hands. Now and again Rand's eyes went to a bisque shepherdess on the mantel. The shepherdess had gilt hair and eyes as blue as the sea in the sun, and before his eyes it seemed to twirl with a rustle of bouffant skirts and to say, "Rings and things are what I need!"

The sound of galloping hoofs in the drive cut the hush, the sound of opening doors. Rand looked up to see Captain Luke Jones in the doorway. He dropped, white-faced, down into a chair at the other side of the fire, dabbing with his handkerchief at his forehead wet with sweat. He had come from the house with the stone deer beside the fountain.

"Dwyer had a stroke," he said.

"I thought so." Rand poured the drinks from the decanter on the table, and the captain downed his neat. "I was on the balcony when his knees buckled."

"His mind seems clear." Staring into the fire, the captain spoke jerkily. "He understands what is said to him, and his eyes move in answer." He dabbed at his forehead again. "But I talked with both Doc Olds and his son. They think he won't walk—or talk—again."

Rand took a box of cigars from the humidor, selected one, and passed the box to the captain. Sitting back in his chair, Rand blew a smoke ring.

"They fell back on Celestia's holdings to cover toward the last, he and Preston, and her last penny is over the dam with theirs." The captain's cigar burned in his hand. "Good God, I can still hear Celestia and Petty scream, but Preston is out of it. He put a bullet through his head."

Rand leaned over to scratch Tige behind the ears. Straightening, he let his eyes rest on the bisque shepherdess as he blew another smoke ring.

"And Spellacy—Sam's wiped out." The captain's nerve broke for a minute, and then his face went rigid.

"Yes, I saw Sam too." The nerve twitched in Rand's cheek. "I saw it from the balcony. I—saw—Sam—going."

He poured again from the decanter. Glass in hand, he stood with his back to the fire, surveying the room, remembering another library where a man had said, "I should take a horse-whip to you, Bole, but I'll leave it to Petty."

"I came through in good shape," he said, and the captain's glass stopped halfway to his mouth as he stared across the rim of it at Rand.

"In good shape?" he said. "*In good shape?*"

"My last barrel of oil in storage went at \$1.52!" The nerve still twitched in Rand's cheek, and the bisque shepherdess looked over his shoulder. "And I let 'em have five hundred thousand in futures all the way down."

The captain drained his glass, set it down. He sat for a full minute looking into the fire while the lines around his eyes etched themselves deeper.

"Bole," he said then, "we're holding a busted flush. You know it, and I know it. How long can we ride it through Rockefeller's pat hand?"

MISS FLORA GREY WAS NO LONGER TENTATIVE ABOUT Mrs. Rand Bole. No more tentative than the rest of them. How could anybody be tentative? On Mrs. Bole's right hand was Cordelia Jones, whom nobody cared to rub the wrong way. Cordelia Jones said of Mrs. Bole, "She's Yankee to the finger tips, isn't she?" And on Mrs. Bole's left hand was Melodia Spellacy—no longer affluent, of course, but somehow still Melodia Spellacy. Melodia Spellacy said of Mrs. Bole, "Yankee? 'Tis Irish she is to the bottom of the soft heart of her, and proud I am to say it!" Then, too, there was Jacques Bedour, indispensable to any social event. Tipping Miss Flora off to the coming affairs for which he would—and would not!—cater, Jacques put his finger tips to his pursed mouth, blowing a kiss into the air, and his black eyes rolled as he said, "Madame Bole? Ah-h-h-h, there is some from the French blood with Madame. You hear Jacques Bedour? He says it!" There were even those among the timber ladies who omitted the Bannon House now when they said, "Mrs. Rand Bole? Oh, yes indeed! I've known her since she was a girl."

So it wasn't tentatively that Miss Flora wrote, "It is rumored that Mr. and Mrs. Rand Bole and Captain and Mrs. Luke Jones will combine this year in receiving their friends on New Year's Day at Bole Hall." Nor were the tension and soul-searching it caused at all tentative. Omission from the list of either Mrs. Bole or Mrs. Jones would be social disaster, but omission from the combined list would mean ostracism. No less! And by the same token, inclusion would mean endorsement that was beyond question. There'd be no hiding which way the cat had

jumped, either; for Miss Flora Grey would devote a whole column of the *Era* to the list, so those asked but unable to be present wouldn't be unjustly numbered among the damned.

And lest their absence should cause even temporary conjecture, the gay young blades, done with racing fast horses and cutters along the glistening length of Boylston Street on New Year's Day, would hasten to don cutaways, wording and rewording a neatly turned compliment for each hostess. Anxious mothers of budding daughters would impress the daughters with the importance of winning the approval of Mrs. Bole and Mrs. Jones. "Do keep your voice down, my dear, and remember, both feet on the floor if you sit down! Don't let me catch you crossing your ankles." And the daughters, impressed to the verge of tears, would practice extending hands before mirrors, struggling for the right shade of deference in their voices as they minced, "How do you do, Mrs. Bole. How do you do, Mrs. Jones. So very glad to see you looking so well, and may I wish both of you a happy New Year?"

Not unconscious of their responsibility, Mrs. Bole and Mrs. Jones sat in Mrs. Bole's sitting room, working alphabetically down the list. The idea of combining for the fray had been Cordelia's, and she still thought well of it. Shaking an accusing finger at Molly, she said, "We couldn't both have had Jacques Bedour, and I know who'd have got him! Molly, do tell Jacques someday to lie down and roll over, will you? For my sake? What a sight to see!"

They sat directly across from each other at Molly's desk. Cordelia held Molly's list in one hand and her own list in the other. Molly wrote down the names upon which they agreed. They had been in complete agreement on the A's and B's and C's. But they had come to the D's. There was no Dwyer on Cordelia's list, *but there it was on Molly's list*. Procrastinating, Cordelia looked up to say, "In fact, Molly, I suggested to Luke that we send you to chat with Mr. Rockefeller. You would have only to say, 'Dear Mr. Rockefeller, we simply must have dollar oil!' And Mr. Rockefeller would say, 'Dear Mrs. Bole, I think you should have two-dollar oil.'"

"Two dollars would be nice." Her pen poised, Molly considered it, and then her expression turned dubious. "But Mr. Rockefeller says he is *all* business, Cordelia!"

"But as a last resort, Molly?" Cordelia was still optimistic.

"Oh, yes indeed!" Molly dipped her pen in the inkwell. "You remember the story Rand tells about Simon? 'Any time Mr. Rockefeller wants we should get together, me and him.'"

Cordelia looked down at the lists again, but it was still there on Molly's list. *Dwyer!* She moistened her lips with her tongue and then, still procrastinating, looked up to let her eyes travel idly around the room. Molly's sitting room was Mr. Peabody in his most wistful mood. The ceiling and sides were paneled with tufted cretonne, relieved by a stile of plain damask. The pattern of the cretonne was a running vine with flowers trained over a trellis. The chairs, the pillow lounge, the ottoman were upholstered in the same cretonne, and the same material was used around the mirror and the shelf beneath. The moldings were of ebony and gilt. The mantel was of Fleur Violet marble, and on it stood the clock from Susse Frères of Paris, with its front and casing of brass, its body of ebony, the figures of its dial painted on round porcelain medallions.

It was insistently feminine. The pillow lounge could have belonged to Madame de Pompadour herself! Still, there were traces of Molly here. Her needle point, stretched on the hoops, was on a table beside her sewing basket. Her book, open there, was just as she had laid it down, and on the desk were the ledgers in which she kept her household accounts.

"This is my favorite room at Bole Hall," Cordelia decided. It brought a glint of mischief to Molly's eyes as they rested upon the pillow lounge. She said, "Do you think Mr. Peabody has a secret life?" Then the mischief faded, and two little puzzled lines appeared between her eyes as she said, "But Rand must like it. He took it for his own while I was sick. I found his pipe here and some of his papers. . . . Who comes next, Cordie?"

Cordelia dropped her eyes to the list again, steeling herself. She said, "Dwyer! That means Celestia and Petty, doesn't it?"

They're out of mourning, of course—and were weepers ever so becoming to anybody as they were to Petty?—but they haven't been going out at all, Molly."

"I'd like to ask them," Molly said, "if only to let them know we're thinking about them."

"But what we're thinking, my dear!" Cordelia's voice was knowing, and she caught the mischief in Molly's eyes. "Oh, Molly, must we? Couldn't we forget them? As much as to say, 'My dear Mrs. Dwyer, nee Dixon! Mrs. Rand Bole joins me in complete indifference to your welfare in the coming year.'"

"But Petty and her father were neighbors of Rand's family on the Creek." Molly held the pen poised while Cordelia looked down at the list, her lower lip caught between her teeth. Her voice was hushed to the confidential level when she looked up to say, "Molly, I've been wondering! Has it ever occurred to you that Petty is a woman without visible means of support?"

"Indeed it has!" The mischief was in Molly's eyes again. "And I suspect Rand."

"Rand?" Cordelia's heart skipped a beat, but tilting her head to one side, she kept her eyes bland as she weighed it, duly amused. "But I'd have said Rand Bole and Mr. Peabody had so little in common."

"Oh, come, Cordie!" Molly's eyes were candid now. "You know the source of Petty's income as well as I do. Rand and she were playmates on the Creek, and she has nobody nearer. Who would have a better right to help her?"

Their eyes met and held. Cordelia watched the curtains close behind Molly's eyes, and then she dropped her own eyes to the brooch that fastened Molly's collar to hide the quick tears stinging behind their lids. The brooch was a modest garnet set in quaint gold filigree. Cordelia reached across the desk to close playfully covetous fingers around it. She said, "How I do envy you that piece, Molly!"

"It came from Ireland." Molly's voice was steady. "With my mother."

"Your mother?" Cordelia laid the lists aside to sit with her

elbows on the desk and her chin in her hands, her eyes on the brooch. "There would be a lady, Molly!"

"I was ten when she died, and I remember so little." Molly's eyes turned to the fire, and for a minute there was only the sound of a slipping ember, the tick of the Louis XV clock on the mantel. "She talked of a house in a park on the Lennon River. There was a fountain in the park, and I remember the pony and the basket cart. I used to dream that we'd live there someday, the—the two of us." Molly's eyes came back to Cordelia, and she smiled. "I was going back, but Rand came. . . . Who is next, Cordie?"

Cordelia picked up the list. *Dwyer!* Celestia and Petty. Cordelia thought, "I could—yes, *I could see Rand Bole dead at my feet.*" It wasn't a matter of having to receive either Celestia or Petty at Bole Hall, of course. They wouldn't dare! It was a matter of their names appearing in Miss Flora's list. It would mean they would be hastily reinstated on lists from which they had been summarily dropped, since Mrs. Jones chose to ignore the obvious. Cordelia said, "Celestia and Petty are next, but I'm disappointed, Molly! I did so much want to believe the worst of Petty!"

And it was Mrs. Jones herself who furnished Miss Flora with the list at ten minutes of three on New Year's Day. She and Miss Flora had come down the marble steps together from Molly's boudoir, where Miss Flora, breathless and bespectacled, had scribbled descriptions of the ladies' gowns in her notebook. After Mrs. Bole's name she wrote, "Garnet velvet, princess style *en train*, Worth. Garnet brooch." And after Mrs. Jones's name came, "Gray satin, velvet panniers, Worth. Diamond and ruby bracelet."

She and Mrs. Jones stood in the entrance hall with the light filtering through stained glass upon the marble stairway and the balustrade wound with smilax and ground pine and holly. The anxious young man from Buffalo tried the pipe organ out with a Bach concerto while the quintet clustered around the piano, tuned stringed instruments for the chamber music. Miss Flora said, "Oh yes, the list, if you please, Mrs. Jones."

"Oh yes!" Mrs. Jones had it ready in her hand, and Miss Flora's eyes, running down it, came to an abrupt stop. Flustered, she pointed to a name.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Jones," she faltered, "but is this—this is *Dwyer*, isn't it?"

"Dwyer, yes." Mrs. Jones enfolded her in a warm smile. "Celestia and Petty. My writing is truly dreadful, isn't it?"

Miss Flora followed Mrs. Jones through the music room, taking note of the flowers as Mrs. Jones stopped for a brief word with the organist and with the harpist. They went from there to the library, where Mr. Bole and Captain Jones were fortifying themselves beside the fire. And what a fine figure of a man Mr. Bole was! He set his glass down to bow low over Miss Flora's hand as he said, "A happy New Year to you, Miss Flora, and many more to come!" Miss Flora's heart was still laboring when she and Mrs. Jones reached the drawing room.

Mrs. Jones stood before one of the marble fireplaces while Miss Flora took note of the rope of smilax and ground pine, the ribbon-tied holly wreaths against the white marble. There were the mingled scents of burning wood, pine, and the roses in tall vases.

"We'll stand here," Mrs. Jones said. "Where would you like to be, Miss Flora?"

Miss Flora's eyes went to the four great Christmas trees, one in each corner of the room, with the firelight playing on their silver ornaments. She said nervously, "Could I have a chair behind a tree? I could see without being noticed."

Then it was three o'clock. Sleigh bells jingled along the drive through the snow-covered park. Mrs. Bole stood beside Mrs. Jones, and the gentlemen were coming from the library to join the ladies. Miss Flora slipped through a door and hurried on to the dining room. How truly exquisite!

She could have stood there just looking for hours, but she had to hurry through the tall wax tapers in branched candelabra, the silver and crystal, the convent-embroidered cloth. She must get the more important toilettes, but how lovely the roses were! Still no hand with vintages, she lumped the wines

into, "Flowing bowl and cup that cheers." She wrote, "Sandwiches en tongue, ham, turkey." She wrote, "Wine jelly, chocolate cake, raisin cake, delicate cake, fruit cake, citron cake, pound cake, macaroons, lady fingers, meringue kisses, lemon, raspberry, strawberry tarts."

Breathless, she slipped into place behind a tree, peering through the branches while the chatter and laughter vied with the shimmering notes of the organ. She found Mrs. Benson in the crush, and Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Satterfield. She was busily twisting in her chair in search of Mrs. McKinney when she became conscious of the sudden stillness of the room. The laughter had died, and the chatter. But they were listening to the harp solo, of course. It was "The Bells of Corneville." No. . . . The ladies stood huddled in close groups with their backs to the room. The gentlemen were preoccupied with their shining patent-leathers, clearing their throats.

Miss Flora stood up to peer through the branches toward the fireplace. Mrs. Bole was greeting Mr. Coon Frisbee, and Mr. Bole touched his handkerchief to his forehead, his eyes fixed on the archway of the entrance hall. Miss Flora followed his gaze; her knees failed her, and she dropped back into her chair.

Standing there in the archway, framed in smilax and holly, with the spray of enticing mistletoe, ribbon-tied, over her head, was *Mrs. James Preston. Petty Dwyer Preston*. Miss Flora blinked and peered again, automatically noting the mink cape, the blue taffeta, the sapphire brooch. And the precious shepherdess hat with the ostrich tips! Mercy, what a ravishing creature she was, and what a poignant picture she made as she stood there alone! There had been so *much* whispering lately, of course, but surely Mrs. Preston would *never* have been asked and she would *never* have come, if—

"Happy New Year, everybody!" Breathless and childlike, Mrs. Preston's voice joined a muted run of harp notes, and Miss Flora got shakily to her feet again, craning to catch sight of Mrs. Bole.

Mrs. Bole smiled up at Mr. Frisbee, and from him to Mr.

Bole. Her glance followed Mr. Bole's to the archway. Then, still smiling, she detached herself, and her train rustled along the carpet in the still room as she made her way toward Mrs. Preston and held out both hands.

"Petty dear!" Her words reached Miss Flora, clear and distinct. "A happy New Year to *you*, and many more to come."

Nor was Mrs. Jones more than two steps behind her. Mrs. Jones looked up at the spray of mistletoe above Mrs. Preston's head and, turning, she flicked her stunned audience with a smiling glance.

"Gentlemen, in your name!" she said merrily. Then she took Mrs. Preston's face between two hands and kissed her lightly on either cheek as Miss Flora, convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt, wrote warmly, "Special welcome was accorded lovely Mrs. James Preston upon her return to the social scene."

Miss Flora could neither see nor hear Mrs. Jones as Mrs. Jones sat beside her husband in the cutter on the way home. Tears pressed against her eyelids behind the nose veil. Beneath the fur robe her gloved hands held tight to a small box Molly had given her as she left. In it was the copy of the garnet brooch Molly had had Tiffany's make for her.

"Luke," she said, "does Rand Bole have a side that she sees and we don't?"

The captain eased the frisking trotter around the corner into Main Street as he weighed it.

"Bole is a showman," he concluded, "and he's got the bearing and the voice to make any role convincing, even to himself. He has drive—the devil himself can't stop him, once he gets an idea into his head!—and he's a fool for luck."

"There's Lennon Oil, Luke."

"Lennon Oil isn't Rand Bole alone." Luke Jones was positive. "Lennon Oil is Rand Bole *and* Molly."

"She'll turn it over to him, Luke. She'd tear her heart out with her own hands for him, and—"

"The day she turns Lennon Oil over to him," Luke Jones said, "Rand Bole will be on his way back to where he came

from. And that, my dear, was hub-deep in the mud behind a team with a blacksnake in his hand!"

"Or she'll hold on, trying to—to——"

"To make him the man she thinks he can be." The captain's voice was tired as he looked up at the gas flares dotting the snow-covered hills. Mingled with the jingle of sleigh bells, the echoing chug of engines, was the moan of a growing gale in the pines. He said, "And God knows I wish her luck."

Miss Flora wished Molly luck, too, in her account of Mrs. Coon Frisbee's euchre party. Miss Flora reported that the Frisbee drawing room had been turned into a Japanese garden for the occasion, a veritable bower of wisteria and colorful lanterns, lacquered screens. Entering merrily into the spirit of it, the ladies had worn imported silk kimonos over their gowns, gifts of the hostess, as they sat cross-limbed on woven straw mats on the floor to drink tea.

"First prize at cards, a bright-hued cockatoo in a gold cage," Miss Flora wrote, "was won by Mrs. James Preston. Consolation was awarded to Mrs. Rand Bole. Better luck next time, Mrs. Bole!"

20

CHERRY GROVE WAS NO FLASH IN THE PAN. IT WAS like planting corn. The drills went down, the shells loaded with nitroglycerin, and the green jets shot high over the derricks. Shut in, they surged into tanks, rested, and surged again. Pipeline gaugers took measure of the tanks and, jotting the figures down, shook their heads. Standard Oil's storage tanks were taxed to capacity. Warning sounded from the Standard's buyers; production was more by a third than the market could absorb. Then over the wire came the ukase from Rockefeller. No more oil could be stored in the Standard's tanks. Oil would be run through the Standard's pipelines only for "emergency shipment." It meant throwing oil onto a glutted market at distress prices.

They held torchlight parades behind a band that blared out the notes of "The Man on the Flying Trapeze." And they drilled on. They carried banners aloft. The banners said, "DOWN WITH MONOPOLY." They said, "GIVE US DOLLAR OIL." And the drills went down. They burned Rockefeller in effigy in front of the Standard's buying office; Rockefeller and Tom Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad. And they drilled on. They painted skulls and crossbones in ghostly white on the Standard's storage tanks. And they drilled on. They met in grim conclave within the Opera House, pledging themselves to drill no more until oil went to a dollar a barrel, and on his knees Rockefeller begged for oil to keep his refineries running. They pledged, "All for one, and one for all!" And they drilled on. If one man didn't drill, the next man would, so to hell with Rockefeller and his calamity howling. What was at the bottom of the next hole?

Mrs. Coon Frisbee interspersed elocution with china painting, searching among the branches of her family tree for a crest. She planned, once she had arrived at the crest—and the genealogist assured her that she would arrive—to paint the crest in gold on dinner service for twenty-four: a tremendous project, but concrete evidence of both her illustrious lineage and her talent for creation.

Coon Frisbee himself, among others, took to the ornamental bar at Hotel La Pierre, a nook with tiled floor, plate-glass mirrors, cut crystal, and shining brass. In his cups, Coon alternated between the darkly morose and the double shuffle. Morose, Coon sang to himself, one foot on the rail and his hat on the back of his head, “‘O-o-o-h, dem golden slippers! O-o-o-h, dem golden slippers! Golden slippers I’s e gwine t’ wear, to walk in de golden street!’”

“Get ’em on and let ’er out, Coon!” It came from along the bar and, roused, Coon made his way down the rail, buttonholed them one by one. He clung to lapels, an Old Man of the Sea, weaving on his feet. His eyes came to tearful focus upon theirs. He mumbled over and over, “I tell you, man, we’re on our way to hell in a basket!” They said, “Oh, for Christ’s sake, Coon!” They shook him off with, “Let her out, Coon!”

*“Oh, the toolie he fiddled, and the driller he drilled.
Fiddlin’ and drillin’, their pockets they filled.
But one fine night they met a whore,
And they’re back in the rig, a-drillin’ some more!”*

Rebounding, Coon slithered into the double shuffle to the rhythmic clap of hands and stamp of feet, swaying and bending, his arms a flailing windmill, his hat sweeping the tiled floor.

*“So they drilled and they drilled and they drilled some more,
And drillin’, m’ lad, is a he-man’s chore.
Oh, ne’er two men in sadder plight
Than them that met a whore one night.”*

Coon wound it up with a double somersault and, by a miracle, landed on his feet.

"That's it, Coon! Now talk to Rockefeller, Coon! Speak up like a man, Coon!"

Coon drew himself up, eying them with profound gravity. He made his pitch on a corner of the bar, shot his cuffs, and fixed them with a mesmeric gaze, giving them a glimpse into a dire future.

"*Lad-ies and gentle-men!*" Coon's blurred syllables wrapped them in honeyed tone. "Step right up and get your oil. Only ten cents a barrel, one dime, the tenth part of a dollar! Don't push, ladies and gents. Don't crowd. Remember Cherry Grove. There is *plen*-ty for all. Fall right in behind Mr. Rockefeller, ladies and gents. Don't push, don't shove. There is *plen*-ty for all!"

Coon wilted. He ducked his chin. He wrung his hands. He bowed and scraped.

"What's that, Mr. Rockefeller? What's that you say? One million barrels at ten cents the barrel? Yes, Mr. Rockefeller. Yes, *sir*, Mr. Rockefeller. Mr. Rockefeller, meet Rand Bole. Mr. Bole, Mr. Rockefeller. Mr. Bole will accommodate you, Mr. Rockefeller. He says he'll see you in hell first, Mr. Rockefeller, *but the hell he will!*"

Coon turned confidential with Mr. Rockefeller. Assuming that the next man along the rail was Mr. Rockefeller, Coon laid an ingratiating arm around his shoulders.

"Has Mr. Bole got a pipeline to the Pennsylvania Railroad, Mr. Rockefeller? Does Tom Scott eat out of his hand? *Hell, no!*"

Hiccuping, Coon edged closer to Mr. Rockefeller.

"Does Mr. Bole own the refineries that buy oil, Mr. Rockefeller? Or the tanks that store it? *Not by a damned sight!*"

Coon thought it over, combing his brain. He scratched his head.

"What the hell has this man Bole got, anyhow?" Coon asked himself.

"*Oil!*" It ran in a groan along the bar, and then a tipsy voice drawled, "Oil and a fancy——"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" Coon wagged an admonishing

forefinger. "Mr. Rockefeller is present! Oil, eh? What th' hell can Bole do with it if he don't want to sell it at ten cents t' my friend, Mr. Rockefeller? You *are* my friend, ain't you, Mr. Rockefeller?"

"To hell with your friend!" Another groan from the bar.

And the shadow of Mr. Rockefeller lay long across the office of the president of Lennon Oil. Rand sat at his desk, studying two sets of figures. One set made clear the accruing storage charges for his oil stored in Mr. Rockefeller's tanks, pending a rise in price. One set made clear the swelling production of the Bradford field, which made a drop in price inevitable. The figures blurred, and in the blur Rand saw a man on a mud-caked horse, singularly free of the oil-slimed mud himself; a man sitting before the fireplace in a cabin on the Creek, jotting careful figures down in a paper-backed notebook; a man with drooping eyelids that gave him a deceptive appearance of languor, who seemed to embody within himself some natural force like the wind and the rain and the roaring blast; a man leaning down to lay a coin in his hand, patting his head and saying, "Waste not, want not."

And that damned draft was at Rand's back again! There was chill in it, as if it swept down from the hills, forerunner of winter's blast. He whirled in his chair to look at the door. It was closed. He turned to the windows. They were open, but it was June, and the sun poured through them. The sun lay like a sheet of molten metal along Main Street, and the air was stifling, still.

A fine mist of cold sweat dampened his forehead as he stood at a window in the sun. It was midafternoon. Victorias, dog-carts, clarences, drawn by blooded horses in gleaming harness, rubbed shoulders with teams and wagons, shooters' buckboards. There was the rumble of wagon wheels on cobblestone, the swish of blacksnakes, the clip of prancing hoofs, the flutter of ruffled parasols, bright colors of flowers on wide leghorn hats. The Standard's gleaming white tank wagon turned into Main Street behind sleek dappled grays, and, turning from the window, Rand looked toward the door again. Yes, by God, the

door was open! Moffat stood there in the doorway, stoop-shouldered, gray-haired, discreet.

"*Shut that goddamned door, will you?*" Rand barked; and, hastily closing the door, Moffat flattened himself against it, apologetic.

"Mr. Osborne from Tiffany's to see you, sir." Moffat cleared his throat nervously. "Mr. Osborne and a General Hauck—General Herman Hauck."

"Hauck?" Rand tapped his forehead with his handkerchief. A nerve twitched in his cheek. "Hauck?"

"Impressive sort of a fellow, sir——"

"Impressive, hell!" Rand took himself in hand. "Send Osborne in."

The chill passed. The nerve in his cheek subsided. His glance went from the picture of the Corporal on his desk to the picture of the Duchess on the wall, the picture of wells on Music Mountain, still pumping! He sat back in the swivel chair, an impressive figure in a suit of light summer worsted by Mathew Rock of Fifth Avenue, who imported his cloths, especially made for Rock, avoiding duplication.

Osborne was a fussy and deliberate little man with his hair parted in the middle and his mind fixed upon the integrity of the House of Tiffany. His eyes were troubled behind the be-ribboned pince-nez as he laid his soberly banded straw sailor aside to take a velvet box from an inside coat pocket, and his forehead was lined with thought.

"We're not exactly pleased ourselves, Mr. Bole." He laid the velvet box, open, on the desk in front of Rand and took his jeweler's glass from another pocket. "We've done our best within the time allowed us, but you know something about sapphires by now, sir, and you will see that the pendant doesn't quite come up to the brooch."

Through the glass Rand examined the pendant beside the brooch against the white satin lining of the box. It was a flawless sapphire, blue as the sea in the sun, set in exquisite gold filigree.

"You notice there isn't quite the same depth, sir." Osborne

rocked on his heels, his hands behind him, weighing it. "Of course the brooch is a museum piece—in many respects, that is—but we realize that the pendant represents no inconsiderable financial outlay, and if you could wait, sir, until—"

"I'll take it." A little smile played around Rand's mouth. He shut the box and stowed it in an inside pocket. Osborne was still undecided himself, but he smiled in sympathetic comprehension.

"Mrs. Bole is having a birthday, no doubt," he said, "but we could keep an eye out for—"

"I'll take it!" The nerve twitched in Rand's cheek again.

"Of course it isn't discernible to the naked eye, or through the glass, unless the stones are in immediate juxtaposition, but—"

"Good God, man, I said I'd take it!" One hand on Osborne's arm, Rand walked with him to the door. He opened the door for Osborne, and in the outer office a gray-haired man with a soldier's bearing stood up. Rand dropped Osborne's arm.

"Ah, so it's you, General!" he said, puzzled. "By George, I thought I remembered that name—but what would bring you from New York?"

"A little matter of diamonds!" At ease, his eyes cryptic, the general smiled as, absently and reluctantly, Osborne eased himself out.

Still weighing the matter of the pendant, Mr. Osborne was oblivious to the pall in the Exchange pit as he went down the stairs, oblivious to the lethargy in the lounge. He stood a minute in the doorway, blinking in the bright sun as his eyes ran up and down Main Street, over the victorias and dogcarts and clarences rubbing shoulders with the teams and wagons. He had an hour to wait before the time came for his appointment with Mrs. Coon Frisbee, who was weighing the idea of filling out her pearls with a tiara. . . . Oil! And fabulous, incredible Bradford!

He turned up Main Street toward Hotel La Pierre, passing McGinnis, the rotund, beet-faced policeman, officiously swing-

ing his club. McGinnis touched the club graciously to his pot-shaped helmet in greeting to Mr. Osborne, a familiar outlander. Mr. Osborne came to Klasen's jewelry store and stopped to examine Klasen's window display. He saw ascending steps covered with fly-specked blue velvet and littered with fat gold watches elaborately scrolled, rings that were entwined gold serpents with diamonds for eyes, heavy gold chains and enormous fobs, diamond studs and diamond collar buttons. Sighing, Mr. Osborne turned away. He passed the alley beside the post office, and Buckthorn, the belligerent harlot lurking in an alley doorway, could have reached out and touched the immaculate seersucker of his coat sleeve.

Buckthorn eased the long feather boa away from her scrawny neck as she peered around the corner of the building after McGinnis. The vigilantes had spoken, and Captain Luke Jones, who led them, was a man of his word; any prostitute caught on Main Street would be railroaded forthwith. But in furtive defiance of it, Buckthorn had skittered through alleys from Pig Island to stand vigil day after day beside the post office, in front of which all the fine carriages came to a stop sooner or later. In front of the post office now, a group of women had stopped to exchange greetings on their way to and from the carriages, their bright parasols clustered like a nosegay. McGinnis had turned. He was coming back. Buckthorn flattened herself in the doorway until McGinnis passed, swinging his club, his brass buttons glinting in the sun.

And this was the day. Out of Congress Street onto Main Street turned a pair of chestnut trotters in silver-mounted harness. Behind them in the victoria, under a lace parasol, sat Mrs. James Preston. The coachman reined in before the post office and cramped the front wheels. Mrs. James Preston lowered her parasol and, her skirts in one hand and the parasol in the other hand, stepped down in sprigged foulard silk, a wide violet-wreathed leghorn, and lace mitts.

Buckthorn adjusted the bedraggled feather boa. She tilted her limp straw hat, weighty with brilliant red roses, at a coquettish angle. She stepped out of the alley onto Main Street,

jauntily swinging her bustle. She met Mrs. Preston head on at the foot of the post-office steps, barring her way.

"Good day to you, m' dear!" Buckthorn shrilled it as her painted face grimaced in an intimate smile.

Mrs. Preston stopped dead. Her eyes widened. Her lips parted, and the quick intake of breath made a gasping sound. She tried to side-step Buckthorn, drawing her skirts away, but Buckthorn stepped with her. Mrs. Preston's eyes narrowed. She drew her lips back over her teeth. She said, "*How dare you!*" Her hands on her hips, Buckthorn leaned forward to peer under the violet-wreathed leghorn, compressing her lips in a tight line.

"Don't you cock that pretty nose of yours at *me*, m' dear!" Buckthorn shrilled it, and then Mrs. Preston struck. The cluster of women screamed as one when the lace parasol came down on Buckthorn's head; the coachman jumped from the box; and, whirling, McGinnis came on the run, his belly jouncing under the brass buttons. Buckthorn had the violet-wreathed leghorn in her fingers. She wrenched it in two, hurled it to the walk, and stamped on it before McGinnis, purple and puffing, pinned her arms behind her. He dragged her, struggling and shrieking, toward the alley.

"Hussy!" Buckthorn shrieked. "*Slut!*"

But she was quiet enough when, after a night in a cell at the station house, she rode to the Erie depot, locked in the Black Maria. McGinnis himself was on the box, and before him loomed the ordeal of putting Buckthorn on the train, but it could have been worse. McGinnis had been dead sure that hell would break over his head, and mentally he had turned in his badge and mace. Crandall, the chief, had thrown up his hands. He said, "The Preston woman . . . Good God A'mighty, the fat's in the fire." But overnight Crandall had cooled off.

"It's like I told Captain Jones and Rand Bole when they dropped in on me last night, McGinnis." The chief unbuttoned his coat, sat back in his chair, and hooked his thumbs in his suspenders.

"Course, I dunno if Bole sees eye to eye with me on it *yet*."

The chief kept his eyes just over McGinnis's head while McGinnis shuffled in his boots. "Bole's all f'r guarding and protecting pure womanhood with his last breath."

McGinnis swallowed and shifted his weight.

"But the captain, now, he kind of upheld me when I said there's twenty whores in this here man's town f'r every officer I got on the force. And how's a man t' know, I says, where one of 'em—or even a couple of 'em!—will bob up next?"

Yes, it could have been worse. McGinnis drew up at the station platform among the cabs and hotel hacks. He sat there, mopping his forehead with his handkerchief, until the train whistled around the bend. He drove himself to it and unlocked the door for Buckthorn. Stepping down in the feather boa and brilliant roses, she swung her bustle jauntily as she walked along the platform.

McGinnis stood there beside her while the mail and freight trucks trundled past them and the station hands leered at him out of the corners of their eyes. Behind him the cabbies and hack drivers whistled in innocent chorus. They whistled "I've Only Been down to the Club, My Dear!" They whistled it until McGinnis's pendant jowls were as scarlet as Buckthorn's roses.

The train came around the bend and ground to a stop. McGinnis handed Buckthorn her ticket. Then reaching in his hip pocket, he drew forth a roll of bills. He thrust them at Buckthorn with a furtive glance behind him.

"All I know is what the chief said," he muttered out of the side of his mouth. "It's from a friend o' yourn, Buckthorn." McGinnis frowned to indicate his personal detachment. "A friend that's got more money'n she's got any good use f'r, looks like."

Buckthorn's face contorted as she stood there clutching the roll of bills. She sniffled, and McGinnis shot an agonized glance behind him.

"Tell 'er——" Buckthorn sniffled. "Tell 'er—— Oh, to hell with it!"

"Come on, there!" McGinnis snorted. "Move on!"

And under his outraged eyes Buckthorn hiked her frowzy skirts thigh-high and thrust the roll into the top of her stocking. She went up the steps of the coach. At the top she reached behind her to titillate her bustle in McGinnis's direction. Turning, she put her thumb to her nose and twiddled her fingers at McGinnis while a riotous guffaw went up along the platform.

It was a departure Miss Flora Grey failed to cover. She covered the departure of Mrs. James Preston. Still convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt, Miss Flora wrote warmly, "Mrs. Luke Jones poured at Mrs. Rand Bole's farewell tea for Mrs. James Preston, who leaves tomorrow for an extended visit in New York. New York's gain is our loss, Mrs. Preston!"

BOLE WAS PUTTING ON A SHOW, AND BOLE KNEW how! The torchlights blazed high, bringing the scarlet and gold braid of the band into bright relief on the Opera House steps. The band blared out with "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers!" It swung into "Battle-Cry of Freedom." It went from there to "Paddle Your Own Canoe," and from that to "Yankee Doodle" and "Are You There, Moriarity?" There was cheer in it and fire, a lilt, the roll of drums, and the high clear notes of a bugle.

But lethargy was upon the crowd filing up the steps, a weariness with words, a sickening sense of futility. This man Rockefeller held three aces against them, and they could back a busted flush until hell froze over, but the showdown had come, and there they were—three aces, by God! Rockefeller controlled the pipeline to the railroad. Rockefeller held the whip hand over Tom Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Rockefeller owned ninety per cent of the refineries, and the rest of them were tottering to the wall. Three aces to their one—oil! And the way wells were coming in, Rockefeller would buy oil for ten cents a barrel a damned sight sooner than he bought it for a dollar.

Coon Frisbee was morose again. He buttonholed them as they filed through the door, fixed them with a piteous gaze, clung to their lapels.

"The game's up!" Coon hiccuped. "Hell, I got more up my sleeve, myself, than any damned Bole that ever lived!"

"Well, well!" They looked Coon over. They whistled. They said, "Pretty nice, but don't let your wife find it out, Coon!"

They filed in, took their seats, and sat back with their eyes

on the stage. The band played in the pit now. It played "Crooked S" and "French Four." It took them back to the Creek, to Pithole and Petroleum Center, to Shamburg and Pleasantville. Their feet kept time on the floor. The band swung into "Opera Roll," and they looked around for Coon Frisbee. Where the hell was Coon? They yelled, "Come on, Coon! Let 'er out, Coon!"

Beyond the band were the flaring gas footlights, and beyond the footlights, the row of potted palms. The garish drop curtain was down. On it was painted Apollo, young and vigorous. The aegis in his extended left hand, Apollo heralded Dawn, a lush woman in Grecian robes who came through a rift in dark clouds in a chariot drawn by four white horses.

The band was folding up, and they squirmed, restless. They said to each other out of the sides of their mouths, "Now if chin-whacking would bring dollar oil . . . !" Yawning, they said, "Chin-whacking or whore-mastering! Come on, Bole, get it off your chest and be done with it!" Suddenly they sat up in their seats.

A great bear of a man had come from off stage to blot Apollo out. He wore big-hole boots, oil-soaked jeans, a wool shirt open down the chest over his red flannel undershirt. His battered oil-soaked hat rode the back of his head jauntily, and under his arm was a banjo! Spellacy, by God!

Sam Spellacy from the Creek, who had shantied with them; Sam, who had drilled his dusters, too; Sam, who was long on the Exchange when Union Oil drilled in their sleeper and had been wiped out with Dwyer. A straight shooter, Sam, and he was coming back too. Luke Jones had staked him to twenty pumping wells, abandoned in the rush for the Cherry Grove gushers and bought up for a song. Sam had cleaned 'em out, shantying again, and kept 'em pumping. And by God, the boy would come back, too, if— Oh hell! They gave Sam a hand, cheering. They yelled, "Come on, Sam! Let's go!"

"Hey, sucker!" It was a badgering drawl from the balcony. "I'll sell twenty thousand barrels at a dollar."

Sam stood there, looking up at the balcony. Grinning, he

called back, "See me in six months, son." They gave him another hand on it, cheering. They yelled, "That's the stuff, Sam! Go right ahead and call Rockefeller. Smoke the so-and-so out, Sam! He's only holding three aces to your one!" Sam strummed his fingers across his banjo, nonchalant, and then over their heads floated Sam's rolling bass:

*"Ofttimes I sit and think of happy hours once spent
As I sat beside the jack-post on the sill
And watched the walking beam as up and down it went
And listened to the birds sing on the hill."*

They were back on the Creek again, hub-deep in the mud, with blacksnakes in their hands; on a derrick floor, one hand on the line; at the forge, swinging a hammer to bring a red-hot bit to gauge, but with hope high. Slowly, as Sam sang, a burning, helpless rage swept over them. God damn it, how much mud had Rockefeller seen? And how many dusters had he drilled? To a man they were with Sam on the second verse, and as it echoed to the rafters Coon Frisbee laid his head in his arms on the back of the seat in front of him and sobbed.

*"Oh, we'll hang the temper screw upon the derrick stand
Lay away the hammer and the drill;
For thirty days it's taken us to put 'er in the sand
From the little hemlock derrick on the hill."*

It died away and they sat back, their throats tight. In the hush the drop curtain rolled slowly up, and they sat forward in their seats, appraising with knowing eye the men on the stage. There was Bole. . . . Their eyes went swiftly beyond Bole to the men with him. But Bole had the blue chips with him, by God. There were Taylor and Satterfield for Union Oil. There was Luke Jones. There was McKinney. And there was Benson.

Bole rose from his chair and stepped forward to the speakers' table in the hush. He stood there with one hand casually in a trouser pocket, the other on the table; handsome and assured. He let his gaze run over his audience, summing them up, and

when he spoke it was quietly and in intimate voice, man to man.

Monopoly had reared its ugly head! Caught in its coils, they were gasping for breath; they who had staked their lifeblood on one hole in the earth; they who had dealt in mud and sweat and nitroglycerin, in chance and loss, in death itself! They who had paid Mother Earth so dearly and in such precious coin for her bounty! They who had brought oil to birth! And present here tonight, in spirit if not in flesh, were men who had died in oil's burning holocaust, in glycerin's treacherous blast, broken on bull wheels, caught in looped sand lines. Present and watching.

"Do no such men still live?" The magnificent voice, mellifluous and sonorous, swelled in scathing rage. "Have only the craven and the lily-livered taken their place?"

It hung in the air for a full minute, and then Bole dropped back to intimate tone. To the craven, to the lily-livered, he had nothing to offer. Nothing! Let them tremble at the thought of Rockefeller. Let them beg Rockefeller for tanks to store their oil, and let them sell it in the end to Rockefeller for a dime a barrel. Let them cry to Tom Scott for tank cars, awaiting his pleasure. And let them go to the wall, fattening Rockefeller's purse.

What could he offer to such men? What could any man that lived do for them? Nothing! Such men were born slaves, they would live slaves, and they would die slaves. And their children, their children's children would be slaves after them.

"Let such men leave now!" The voice swelled again in searing contempt.

It dropped back. But to free men? He had something to offer, yes! To men who had dared again and again to risk their all on one hole in the ground? He had something to offer, yes. Something to offer to men who dared to say with him, "*No man, by God, will hold the whip hand over me!*"

Something to offer? *Everything!* Freedom from the slimy coils of monopoly tightening around them even as he spoke. A just and fair return on mud and sweat and risk. Control of the industry they, themselves, had brought to birth.

"And what do you have to lose as you sit before me?" The voice swelled again. "Only one last gasping breath! The death rattle!"

Calm again, assured, he laid it before them. *A pipeline of their own straight to the coast, cutting out Tom Scott and his railroad.* A line in which every producer in the field would have his share and his voice. A line that would belong to no single man and to no small group of men. And then—once they had broken through the net—their own refineries on the coast, their own ships to bear their own kerosene to other shores. Oil, transportation, refining; a pat hand.

"Give me a million dollars!" The voice soared, purposeful and sure. "*I'll lay the line.* Buy a share for your wife. Buy a share for each child. It will nourish them and their children's children, heritage from fathers who were *men*!"

They sat silent, thinking, but their hearts had begun to pound. Six hundred miles to the coast—three times the length of any pipeline yet laid—over terrain that was rough and mountainous. . . . It would have to be six-inch pipe—six-inch was heavier than any pipe yet used.

"Will it work?" Bole read their thought. "*I tell you that it will!*"

"And who th' hell're you, Bole?" Coon Frisbee was on his feet in the sixth row, weaving. Still morose, Coon inquired thickly, "And how much stock'll Lennon Oil buy?"

Bole stood regarding the gentleman in the sixth row with easy tolerance. He thanked the gentleman for his questions. He considered them a good omen. Mr. Frisbee, as Bole remembered it, had had a vital part in the first pipeline ever laid.

It rocked the house. They yelled, "Let 'er out, Coon!" Subsiding, they yelled, "Sit down, Coon! Shut up, Coon!"

"And who am I?" Bole came to the answers. "I am Rand Bole from the Creek, president of Lennon Oil, and in that capacity I can say that Lennon Oil will buy ten shares to Mr. Frisbee's one!"

And again it was Coon Frisbee, badgered and befogged, who

set the ball rolling. Coon hiccuped. "That'll let you in for a cool fifty thousand, Bole."

"Fifty thousand from Lennon Oil!" Bole was in. "And to Mr. Frisbee's five." He turned to the men behind him and called the roll.

"Union Oil?"

"Fifty thousand!" Taylor and Satterfield spoke as one for Union Oil.

"Captain Jones?"

"Fifty thousand, sir!"

"Mr. McKinney?"

"Fifty thousand, Mr. Bole!"

"And Mr. Benson?"

"Fifty thousand!"

It drew them to the edges of their seats, to their feet. They stood on the seats, cheering. They sailed their hats into the air. The blue chips were down, and this was it. They yelled, "Bole! Bole! Three cheers for Bole!" Tears in their eyes, they waved handfuls of bills in the air. Bole! Drop this go-devil down the hole, by God! See 'im crash the firing head, touch off the shot, and watch hell break loose! Overnight they gave him the million dollars, and they elected him president of the Seaboard Pipeline Company.

This was it, and it was theirs. They were in, and to a man. Now let Rockefeller look his cards over again! Let Rockefeller raise 'em—and raise 'em again! And let Tom Scott fold—the railroads were out. Crude oil? Ah! Crude oil was still in the game, and staying, by God!

Why, this man Bole was a royal flush in himself! He had vision and he had guts. Once a mule skinner on the Creek, he spoke for Lennon Oil today. . . . He didn't give a good god-damn how he got there, maybe, but he got there, didn't he? And he'd caught Rockefeller off guard, hadn't he? He'd seen the loophole and he'd kick his way through, come hell and high water. Watch him! Watch the bastard! Bole! Three cheers for Bole!

The only reservation was in the mind of General Hauck,

engineer. His forehead creased in thought, the general sat in the office of Lennon Oil, studying this man Bole, as Bole walked the floor, flushed and triumphant. All these men were gamblers; generous and free-handed, easily reached, but gamblers. And gamblers were lone wolves, every man for himself. The line to the coast was a long shot, of course, and only a gambler's chance; but the general wondered if Bole hadn't outfoxed himself. In Bole's place, he'd have gone the whole hog, himself, and kept control of the stock in his own hands—with Rockefeller in the offing.

"Was the wide distribution of the stock your idea, Bole?" The general concentrated on lighting his cigar.

"You're damned right it was my idea!" Walking, his forehead furrowed, Bole thought out loud. "Rockefeller will raise us in some way, and just as sure as God made little apples! I say he'll build a competing pipeline to the coast—if ours works. But how much oil will he get from stockholders in the Seaboard?"

Taken aback, the general looked his man over again. Here was the man who would lead the fight to the death for the control of the oil industry from the ground to the lamp and stove. He looked the part, all right. And, by George, the man was a showman! He could make spines tingle with that voice of his. He could lift men out of themselves and weld them together—for the moment, at least.

"Think you can hold 'em together?" The general studied the end of his cigar.

Stopping dead, Bole turned on him, the surging elation in his eyes.

"You asked me for a million, didn't you?" Bole chuckled, triumphant. "And I took 'em for it, didn't I?"

THE FIGHT WAS ON, AND TO THE FINISH. THERE WAS only an austere silence from Rockefeller, but General Hauck was wary. He sent his engineers and surveyors in various directions in an elaborate feint while agents sped stealthily in another direction to buy up the right of way for the line.

On the wall of Rand's office hung a map; and, his cigar dead in a corner of his mouth, Hauck followed the agents on the map with a pencil as the telegraph instrument clicked off their reports and Charlie Todd's voice droned on, "They've picked up the Smith farm, sir. Hundred and twenty acres." That took them across Tioga County. The agents headed south. At the rate they were going, they could have been taking a downhill grade on greased skids. Hauck lit his cigar and, puffing, glanced from the line on the map to Rand.

"They've lost the scent," he said. "We've got 'em running in circles!"

Rand sat at his desk, his face impassive. His eyes, opaque, turned to Hauck, but it wasn't Hauck he saw. It was a man whose drooping eyelids gave him a deceptive appearance of languor. He held three aces, and it was his move.

He moved. Charlie Todd sat up, stiffening in his chair as he listened, taut. His eyes turned to Hauck at the map, and from Hauck to Rand as the instrument clicked. Charlie stammered, "The Forbes farm . . . two hundred acres . . . right of way gone to the Standard . . . diagonal to us."

"Tell 'em to cut around it." Hauck's cigar stopped halfway to his mouth.

The cigar hung dead in his mouth as the line on his map

turned steadily aside to form a T. The instrument clicked on from day to day, and Charlie Todd bent over it. The agents were in Lycoming County, still racing diagonally, and blocked. Lycoming County was airtight for the Standard, diagonally across their path. They raced on into Union County to hit a stone wall head on. The Standard was ahead of them. They were in Snyder County and stopped in their tracks. The Standard had got there first. The line on the map traveled diagonally through Perry County, Cumberland, Adams.

Lost the scent? Traveling in circles? The Standard had bought up a right of way straight across the state from the northern boundary to the southern boundary, and the T was complete on the map. Crestfallen, Hauck studied it.

"They're ahead of us"—he shrugged—"and all the way!"

The nerve twitched in Rand's cheek. His eyes, opaque, turned to the windows and the door. They came back to the map as the names of his men in the outer office ran through his mind. Canfield? No. . . . Moffat? Moffat had lost his shirt in the bucket shop next door when Cherry Grove came in. Spencer? No. . . . Moffat. Moffat had a sickly wife. Thorpe? No. . . . Moffat, with his load of drab spinster daughters. Rand's jaw shot forward. His hand came down on the bell.

The door opened, but he kept his eyes half closed on the map. He let Moffat stand there in the doorway a full minute, stoop-shouldered, gray-haired, discreet, and with that cringing fear in his eyes.

"Shut that goddamned door, will you?" Rand turned on him; and, jumping, Moffat shut the door, flattening himself against it. Their eyes met, and Moffat's face went a pasty white.

"Come here, Moffat." Rand's voice was gentle. At the sound of it Moffat gulped.

"See this, Moffat?" Rand followed the crossbar of the T on the map for Moffat's benefit. "See this line? It's a right of way, and you're to find me a hole in it."

His voice was casual. He might have been asking Moffat for the time of day. Moffat's face turned slowly gray as his hair

while he looked at the map. There wouldn't be any hole. He swallowed, and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down.

"It it's the Standard, sir," he quavered, "I doubt—"

"*You doubt!*" Rand's face was suddenly livid, wrung. His hand closed over Moffat's black tie and wing collar. He shook Moffat like a rat until Moffat's head wobbled loosely on his shoulders. He dropped Moffat, and Moffat straightened his collar and tie, smoothed his hair with shaking fingers, as Rand's eyes ran over him, impersonal and remote.

"You still doubt, Moffat?" Rand's voice, smooth with silken undertones, offered Moffat an alternative.

"No, sir." Moffat kept his eyes down, their lids half closed.

"Then you'll be on that ten-ten train?"

"Yes, sir." Moffat's step was uneven but soundless across the office. He shut the door soundlessly behind him.

Charlie Todd swabbed the cold sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand; Hauck picked up his hat.

"My advice to you, Bole, is not to turn your back on that man," Hauck said curtly. "If you do, he'll murder you someday in cold blood."

He shut the door smartly behind him, and that damned wind was at Rand's back again! There was a chill in it as he sat at his desk, blue-lipped but impassive. Outside the sun shone hot on horses lathering under the harness, and men in shirt sleeves turned into saloons for a cooling beer, but the windows of the office were shut tight, and the air was close and still. Charlie Todd's coat and vest hung over the back of his chair in the alcove. His collar and neckband were open, and his tie hung loose. His shirt clung damply to his back, and he shoved the green shade high on his forehead to mop the trickling sweat.

The instrument began to click and, stiffening, Charlie looked timorously sidewise toward Rand. On thin ice, sweating, Charlie let his voice slide gingerly over the words as he said, "Carson for the Pennsylvania, sir. Re your order for tank cars, still none available. Will inform you."

Tom Scott of the Pennsylvania was raising him, holding out on tank cars for Lennon Oil. Rand walked to a window and

stood looking out. The sun had begun to drop over the hills in a crimson glow. Against the glow, giant Weymouth pines stood outlined along the ridge. No oil accepted for storage in the Standard's tanks. Oil would be run only for "emergency shipment" in the Standard's pipeline connecting with the Pennsylvania, but no tank cars were available to Lennon Oil at present. They were after him, and no holds barred. . . . Christ! Before Rand's eyes the giant pines on the ridge seemed to bend and twist. Flattened, they hugged the ridge before a blast that drove whirling funnels of snow before it.

His veins were packed with ice. His lips turned blue. He bit down on his teeth to keep them from chattering. But his eyes were steady and unwavering, his facial muscles rigid. Only the nerve twitched in his cheek. There was Moffat. Somewhere Moffat and his agents, pussyfooting into drowsing courthouses, pored over musty records, running deeds back for flaws, soundlessly probing a stone wall.

The instrument was clicking. Charlie sat up in his chair, listening, taut. Rand caught it before Charlie slumped back in his chair. He knew before Charlie's voice slid over the words, "No hole in Adams County, sir. They're moving on tonight. Will inform you." Charlie reached for his hat. His coat and vest over his arm, he tiptoed to the door at Rand's back and shut the door softly behind him. Turning from the window then, Rand walked into the washroom off his office. There he leaned over the zinc basin and vomited into it, retching.

Cumberland County? Airtight for the Standard. Perry County? Airtight for the Standard. Snyder County and Union County? Airtight. Downstairs in the lounge there was creeping lethargy. The shadow of Rockefeller lay long across the floor of the Exchange, where they scrambled to unload at any price while they could still get tank cars and before Rockefeller, *all* business, could run his eye further down the list of stockholders in the Seaboard Pipeline. God A'mighty, they couldn't drink oil, could they?

And at the bar in Hotel La Pierre, Coon Frisbee sang to himself, morose again, weeping into his glass as he sang "Gliding

down the Stream." Then sorrow gave way with Coon to righteous rage. He buttonholed the men along the rail and, clinging to lapels, he asked them, "God damn it, what's this man Bole got outside of a wife that owns——"

"He sold you a bill of goods, didn't he, Coon?"

"Chr-r-rist, yes!" Coon pondered it, clinging, still wondering how it had happened. "And what's he got, I ask you, outside of a wife——"

"Ever notice how often business takes him to New York?" they asked Coon. And gravely they reminded him, "New York's gain is our loss, Coon!"

Flesh fell away from Rand. The Rock worsted hung loose on his frame. His eyes, still steady and unwavering, opaque, sank in his head. His cheeks were lean hollows, but only the nerve twitched there. Moffat was in Lycoming County, and after that there was still Tioga. With his back to the wall, Moffat, gray-faced and sniveling, would cover every inch of the ground.

In his alcove Charlie Todd made himself as inconspicuous as his sweating bulk would allow. When the instrument began to click Charlie shrank visibly, a wary eye on Rand at his desk. It would be Carson for the Pennsylvania again. Still no tank cars available, but Carson would inform them. It would be either Carson or Moffat. Lycoming County was airtight, but Moffat would inform them.

The instrument clicked one day just as Charlie, sweating, reached for his hat and picked up his coat and vest. Sinking warily back in his chair, Charlie slid his voice over the words, "Williamsport, Lycoming County, sir. Moffat coming in." The instrument clicked on, and suddenly Charlie stiffened in his chair. His eyes, bulging, went to Rand. Listening, Rand flicked the ashes from his cigar, and Charlie stammered, "You—you hear it, sir? A creek . . . sixteen feet wide . . . title of bordering farms only to bank of creek." Rand sat as if he'd been turned to stone, and Charlie shouted, "*By God, this is it, sir!*"

Charlie let himself expand as it dawned on him. With a whoop he was out of his chair, hilariously jiggling. Jiggling, he

shook hands with himself and let the sweat trickle. He hugged himself, wild-eyed and puffing. He stopped jigging and stood stock-still, rigid as a setter on point, as his eyes turned thoughtful. Then, in shirt sleeves and green shade, he went through the door as if he were shot out of a gun on his way to the bucket shop next door.

Rand walked to a window and threw it wide. It was dusk. Gas flares dotted the hills like giant fireflies. Lamps glowed in the windows of shops and saloons, and from hill to hill the chug of engines and churn of drills echoed and re-echoed, while down from the hills swept a cooling breeze, pine-scented. It swept over him, ruffling his hair, and he breathed deep. The pines on the ridge stood outlined against a fading glow, tall and straight, unbending. From the window he could see the lights of Bole Hall, set back in a park on the crest of a rise. Rand Bole from the Creek!

No tank cars available to Lennon Oil, eh? Tom Scott's throat was cut from ear to ear now. Rockefeller's pipeline to the Pennsylvania would rust in the ground, and his refineries would stand idle. There was one ace Rockefeller didn't hold—*oil*! Elation surged through Rand. His blood ran swift and warm.

"Now crack the whip, you goddamned pirates!" It burst from his throat in an exultant shout to vie with the blare of a German band in Ike Nolan's Golden Fiddle Saloon across the street.

The band played "The Bells of Corneville."

THEY'D BROKEN THROUGH THE NET. THE LINE OF six-inch pipe began to crawl coastward like a giant undulating snake. The right of way was theirs to the coast. Hauck's engineers had laid out the course. Blacksnakes whistled as mud-mired teams strained to pull wagons stringing the pipe along the course. Gangs of brawny Irish pipeliners bent to the tongs, coupling the lengths of screw pipe on top of the ground except through cultivated land, where the diggers buried the line below the plowshare. High *up* and low *down*. High *up* and low *down*. High *up* on the tongs and low *down* on the tongs. The pipeliners chanted it, bending to the rhythmic turn of the tongs on the joints, and there was only the austere silence from Rockefeller.

Then the letter came. There it was atop the pile of mail on Rand's desk. The surging elation was in his eyes. A cool breeze sweeping down from the hills came through the office windows to rough his hair, and the echoing chug of engines, the thump of busy drills were in his ears when, leaning idly back in the swivel chair, his feet cocked on the desk, he ripped the letter open and glanced at the signature. Aha! Rand Bole, president of Lennon Oil and the Seaboard Pipeline, was in receipt this fine morning of a letter from John Archbold, Rockefeller's chief henchman! Whistling blithely through his teeth, Rand glanced through the letter. He read:

DEAR RAND,

I've been promising myself a visit to the Bradford field, and I've settled upon the week of the tenth. It occurs to me, however, that you and Molly are the two I'd like most to see, and

I'm writing to inquire if two of my favorite friends will be there at that time. Cordially,

JOHN ARCHBOLD

The whistle stopped abruptly. The surging elation gave way to the quick wariness of a jungle thing at the snap of a twig or soft rustle through leaves. Two lines etched themselves deep across Rand's forehead as he read the letter again, studying it. Archbold! A frank and faithful friend but a slippery adversary. . . . Archbold! Suddenly, as he studied the letter, John Archbold seemed to leap out at him from the written page, a man with a shy, scholarly exterior that belied the inner yeast; nimble and quick, with a long sure reach.

And damn his soul—*you and Molly!* Rand's face drew still even as hot savage rage lit his eyes and the nerve began to twitch in his cheek. His hands knotted into fists in his pockets as he walked the floor, thinking. Yes, by God, the Seaboard Pipeline had driven his own weakness home to Rockefeller—oil! And they were planning to move in, the goddamned pirates, on the best proven oil properties. *You and Molly!* Yes, sir, that was it. *Rockefeller was drawing to transportation and refining for oil while he drew to oil for transportation and refining.* And they thought they saw their chance in Lennon Oil!

You and Molly . . . That damned wind was at Rand's back again. He stopped walking to jerk the windows down. Whirling, he faced the door. Yes, by God, the door was open! Moffat stood there in the doorway.

"Shut that goddamned door, will you?"

Moffat shut the door hastily and flattened himself against it. He kept his eyes discreetly down, their lids half closed, but the cold corrosive hatred emanated from him in waves.

"Mr. Osborne from Tiffany's, sir," he quavered. "By appointment, he says."

Osborne was as fussily dapper as ever in his seersucker suit; dapper but moist. He removed his pince-nez and tapped his forehead with a snowy handkerchief as his puzzled glance traveled from Rand to the closed windows. Fanning himself

with the soberly banded sailor, he said tentatively, "Warm even for August, isn't it?" Rand sat unresponsive and scowling at the letter on his desk, and Osborne nervously extracted the purple velvet case from an inner breast pocket to lay it open on the desk with his jeweler's glass. He stood back, expectant and beaming, intent upon Rand's expression.

"We feel we've eclipsed ourselves this time, Mr. Bole," he prompted as he rubbed his hands happily while Rand glanced through the glass at the sapphire bracelet, blue as the sea in the sun against its nest of white satin.

"Twenty-one stones"—Osborne waxed ecstatic—"and every stone cloudless. Notice how they are matched in shade, sir, and——"

Rand snapped the case shut and slipped it into a coat pocket. Osborne blinked, and his face fell. The matter was obviously concluded, but Osborne lingered stubbornly. His earnest eyes clouded over behind the pince-nez, and the integrity of the House of Tiffany was heavy upon him again.

"Now about the pendant again, Mr. Bole." Damn the fellow, he stood there rocking on his heels, still weighing it! "Mrs. Bole was not—ah—exactly pleased?"

Rand looked up from the letter, his face closed. Only the nerve twitched in his cheek, but there was a brittle edge in his voice when he said, "The pendant was satisfactory." And Osborne held his ground, rocking, still weighing it.

"As I said, sir, we weren't entirely satisfied ourselves, and——"

"All right, *all right!*" Rand snapped it out with finality. His eyes dropped to the letter again, and Osborne reluctantly picked up his hat. He had reached the door, his hand was on the doorknob, when Rand stopped him.

"Just a minute, Osborne!" Rand drummed the fingers of one hand on the desk, thoughtful. "What in hell is that dark red stone, anyhow?"

"Dark red, sir?" Osborne held the door half open, pondering it.

"Shut the door, will you?" Rand scowled; and, hurriedly

closing the door, Osborne mused, "*Dark* red? You wouldn't mean the garnet, sir!"

"How in hell do I know what I mean?"

"But we'd hardly call the garnet a stone, sir. It's a vitreous mineral——"

"Forget it!" Still scowling, Rand looked at the letter, but encouraged, Osborne let go of the doorknob to turn back. His earnest face alight, and with the air of conferring a special treat, he took a small velvet box from the inner breast pocket and laid it open on the desk with the jeweler's glass. He stood back, expectant and beaming, rubbing his hands happily as Rand looked through the glass at a pearl circled with diamonds.

"Now there you see a pearl, sir!" Osborne glowed. "And notice the exquisite cut of the diamonds, if you will. That's the Regent cut, sir." Osborne's glow faded slowly. His eyes clouded over again, and he sighed as he added, "Mrs. Frisbee is partial to pearls, and I thought perhaps——"

Rand snapped the box shut and slipped it into his pocket. Osborne blinked. He stammered, "You—you had a pearl in mind, sir?"

"I'll take it." Rand's glance followed a line from Osborne to the door, but fairly dancing in distress, Osborne twittered, "Mrs. Bole might not be pleased, sir. Some of them don't care for pearls, you know." He smiled uneasily to deprecate feminine notions as he explained, "They associate pearls with tears, sir, some of them, and partial as Mrs. Bole is to sapphires, I doubt——"

"You can leave Mrs. Bole to me, Osborne!"

"Of course, you could show it to her, and if——"

Rand was out of his chair. He had Osborne by the arm, propelling him toward the door so smoothly that, on the other side, pearlless, Osborne could only wonder how he got there. Rid of the fellow at last, Rand sat down at his desk. His eyes were bland again and he whistled softly through his teeth as he picked up a pen and drew a sheet of paper toward him. He could match John Archbold in casual friendliness any day in the year! He wrote:

DEAR JOHN,

I regret to say that Molly and I will not be here the week of the tenth, and I can hardly predict the duration of our absence. Molly has been overdoing lately, and much concerned about her health, I am taking her to Saratoga this week. If I understand the lady—and I think I do!—she will doubtless defeat me by killing two birds with one stone. I want her to rest and take the waters, but I suspect she has chosen this time to sit to Sargent for the portrait she promised me. I know she would want me to emphasize our regret at missing you. Cordially,

RAND BOLE

And the pearl was in his pocket beside the sapphire bracelet as he drove up Congress Street behind the slim-legged trotters. They came to the house with the stone deer beside the fountain. The deer stood belly-deep in unmowed grass. The fountain was still, long since choked with dead leaves. Grass and weed stubble dotted the graveled drive. Paint peeled from the windward side of the house and of the empty stables. The curtains hanging limp at the long windows had a dingy cast. Somewhere within that house with its look of decadent gentility lay a bed-ridden man, speechless and wasting, dependent upon the ministrations of an embittered and vengeful hag. Rand looked straight ahead between the trotters' ears, whistling softly.

The trotters turned under the arch between stone pillars, slipping along the drive that wound through the park under overhanging elms. A bend in the drive revealed the chaste outlines of Bole Hall on the crest of the rise, gleaming white in the sunset. A boy ran, breathless, from the stables to take the horses. Rand's step across the veranda was confident and firm. The great entrance hall was cool, with only the light sifting through stained glass. It played over the crisp maid who took his hat, quickly covering her surprise when, glancing through the arch supported by four Corinthian pillars into the dim recesses of the drawing room, he said, "Mrs. Bole?"

"She would be dressing for dinner, sir, I think. She asked me to remind you that you are dining with Captain and Mrs. Jones."

His brisk step on the marble stairs echoed in the stair well, but the sound of it was smothered in the soft pile of the Kermin Sha rugs on the mezzanine and along the hall. He opened the door of Molly's sitting room quietly. She wasn't there. Only her needle point on the hoops with the needle and thread sticking upright in it; the needle point, a book open on an inlaid table beside the lamp, and a bowl of pansies and alyssum, her ledgers on the Louis XV desk. The windows were thrown wide, and the breeze sweeping down from the hills bellied the curtains.

Rand stood at an open window, looking out to the hills with the giant pines along the ridge, the derricks lacing the sky, the puffs of steam against the fading glow of setting sun. Always in this room, somehow, he felt that Ma was somewhere near; as if he had only to reach out and Ma would take his hand in hers, her step sure and dominant beside his; as if he had only to look toward the mantel of Fleur Violet marble to see Ma sitting there in the firelight with the Holy Writ in her lap and to hear her ask him, "What is thy duty toward thy neighbor?"

He walked through the bathroom of white Italian marble over which a faint mist of steam still lingered and opened the door of the dressing room. Molly was there. She was brushing the blue-black hair at the dressing table, and it hung to her waist in a soft dusky cloud. She wore a white gabrielle of something cool and transparent, diaphanous. A blue ribbon bow gathered it at her breast, and two bows caught the full sleeves to her wrists. The brush stopped midway of a stroke as she turned in the chair, startled. The warm glow from the bath faded, and the dusky cloud framed swift pallor in which the dark eyebrows stood out like the spread of a blackbird's wing, the fine-chiseled features. Then only the pulse beginning to pound in her temple and her hands holding tight to the brush in her lap betrayed any feeling as their eyes met and held.

And again there were two of Rand in one body. One of him was stricken shyly dumb like any rawboned, heavy-handed young buck at a husking bee on the Creek, stripping the husk away from a red ear and looking aghast out of the corner of

his eye at the apple-cheeked girl beside him. The other one, crisply handsome as he leaned there in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, purposeful, raging inwardly, hurling himself against the bars that held him, spoke with an assured ease.

"Mrs. Bole, I believe?" He touched lightly on a closed door between them. "I trust you've been well?"

Color rushed up from the blue bow at her breast to form spots of scarlet on her cheekbones under his appreciative eyes, and the knuckles of her hands gripping the silver brush in her lap showed white. She sat gripping the brush as he came on with the velvet box in his hand, and his arm was quickly around her shoulders, restraining and possessive.

He felt the tremble run through her at his touch. He laid the velvet box open on the dressing table, watching her breast rise and fall in the mirror as she sat with her lower lip caught between her teeth, looking down at the pearl like a great tear in a bright sparkle of diamonds. She looked up, and their eyes met in the mirror.

"For-me?" The pupils of her eyes were distended.

"For Mrs. Rand Bole!" His voice was vibrant and deep as his hand tightened on her shoulder. In his eyes, holding hers in the mirror, was a desperate plea. A plea—and a promise. Her face was slowly illumined, and her eyes filmed softly over with tears. Then he was on his knees beside her. His arms went around her waist, clinging. His face was against her breast, and a sob ripped up through his chest, shaking him.

"Molly, I'm so tired, and I—I've been—all—mixed—up."

Molly's arm went around his head, pressing it close. Her hand on his forehead, brushing the sandy forelock tenderly back, was as cool and steady as Ma's when he had tossed in fever. She laid a cheek against his, and his cheek was wet with her tears. The soft dusky cloud of hair smelled sweet and fresh like Ma's cotton blankets when they'd whipped on the line in the sun and the wind.

"Don't, Rand," she said with her cheek against his. "It—it's all right. Everything's all right."

And he couldn't have told which of him it was who said, "Can't we run away, Molly? For just a little while—together?"

24

SARATOGA! AND ANOTHER REFLECTION IN ANOTHER mirror. It was the mirror on the elaborately scrolled black walnut dresser in the stiff bedroom of their suite at the United States Hotel, and Molly's eyes laughed into it. On his knees at her back, Rand matched hooks and eyes down the boned bodice of her gown.

He had tossed his tails across the footboard of the massive black walnut bed. Three times now he had run his hands through his hair. His white tie was askew, and he stopped, frowning, to run a finger around the inside of the high wing collar, but the diamond stud gleamed, indomitable, in his shirt front. How earnest he looked, and young; even boyish! The intent look had vanished, the rigidity of his facial muscles. The thud of drills, the creak of walking beams and chug of engines, the crack of nitroglycerin and sound of whistling black-snakes were far away as he looked up, baffled, to let his eyes run over her reflection in the glass.

The blue-black hair, drawn close and smooth over her ears, was piled high on the small head. The low square-cut décolletage laid bare the slender line of her throat and the white swell of her breast. The gown was blue Mechlin lace, sheer as a cobweb and shading into her eyes. Nosegays of tiny flowers caught the lace in scallops around the bottom of the skirt, and the skirt, gathered full over the bustle, fell in a froth to the floor.

"Damn it, I've got two hooks left over!" Rand exploded, and Molly's laugh rang out. Turning, she took Rand's flushed face between her hands. With a forefinger she smoothed the lines

between his eyes and rested her cheek against the sandy hair.

"Rand, let me call a maid," she said.

"Over my dead body, madame!" Rand's jaw shot forward. "But could you stand still?"

"I could wear something with buttons," Molly teased. "I have something with only twenty-nine buttons and loops, and——"

Rand let his eyes linger upon the boned bodice and the eighteen-inch waist.

"You'll wear this while you can!" It was orders. "It's not good for a man to be without a son."

Quick crimson rushed up to her cheekbones, and Rand's laugh rang out; but, tossing her head, Molly said, "I must wear a gown out? But you don't know who I am!"

Rand's hands all but spanned her waist as he picked her up grimly and set her down facing the mirror. She smoothed the long gloves of French kid on her arms, watching him as, on his knees again, he unhooked the bodice and started over. Yes, this was Rand Bole—this one.

A breeze, bellying the curtains, brought with it the scent of pine. Through a window and across the veranda Molly looked down into the elm-shaded court with its bandstand, its promenade paths dividing beds of petunias and pansies, alyssum and mignonette. Bright-colored lanterns swung in rows from tree to tree, and the stars overhead were still pale in the afterglow of sunset. Dusk at Saratoga.

In the hall were the quick steps of scurrying maids and bell-boys. From behind closed doors came the sound of muffled chatter. From downstairs came one insistent note on the piano and the sound of stringed instruments, tuning. As if from far away came the cries of fruit vendors on Broadway, the smart clip of horseshoes on pavement, the rumble of carriage and cab and bus wheels. And over all was the air of festive excitement.

The hooks and eyes came out even. Rand stood up to wriggle into his tails. He leaned toward the mirror, smoothing his hair and adjusting his tie. He turned then to let his eyes run over her, and the lines appeared again between his eyes.

"Has no man ever looked upon you with favor?" he said.

"My diamonds!" Molly gasped, reminded. She opened a dresser drawer to take out the purple velvet case. She donned the solitaire earrings, the bracelets, while Rand affixed the brooch. He slipped the pearl in its bright sparkle of diamonds on her finger and, eyes lowered, he said, "Forsaking all others!" He held her off from him then to gauge the general effect, a slight figure in lace and diamonds with laughing eyes.

"What's that thing Liz Frisbee wears on her head?" he said, and horrified, Molly made as if to study him through a lorgnette.

"Liz Frisbee? Can you possibly mean Mrs. Coon Frisbee and her tiara?"

Rand caught her to him. He kissed her forehead, and then her eyes and mouth and throat. He said, "Just the same, you'll wear one, my lady!" Molly burrowed her head into his shoulder. In the voice of patient suffering she said, "Rand, how can you be so cruel?"

"You're my wife, aren't you?" Rand was grimly adamant. "And that means you wear diamonds."

Theirs was the second floor, the second deck of verandas. The long inner hall was dim. They stood for a minute, looking down into the well of the stairway that curved from floor to floor, and into the buzzing lobby with its blazing brass chandeliers, the brass spittoons and potted palms. The great crystal chandelier in the parlors scintillated above elaborately coiffed heads. The orchestra played "The Blue Danube," and for a minute they were alone in the hall.

Rand's arm went around Molly's waist. Her gloved hand was in his as they waltzed, whirling. *One-two-three. One-two-three. One-two-three.* They stopped, laughing and breathless, and Rand held Molly off from him.

"Well, who are you?" he said, and up went the lorgnette.

"My good man, have you never read Miss Flora Grey? I am 'the charming chatelaine who adorns Bole Hall!'" She studied him through the lorgnette, turning more and more dubious until she said, "But you?"

Rand drew himself up to his full height, his arms folded across his chest.

"Madame, I am the man who called Rockefeller's hand!"

Molly's eyes flew wide. Her hand went to her heart. Breathless, she said, "Not—*not Rand Bole?*"

"In person, madame!" Rand was austere. Molly curtsied low in billowing lace, but Rand raised her graciously to tuck one hand within his arm. Then, with her hand on Rand's arm, they were descending the stairs. Yes, this was Rand Bole—this one.

Eyes turned toward the stairs from the lobby and the parlors. The buzz of voices hushed to whispers. Heads came together, and lips formed the word, "Oil!" A flurry of tails met them at the foot of the stairway. The suave head usher popped from his station under the stairs. The manager bustled from his office behind the desk. The ebony headwaiter bowed in the dining-room archway with a flash of white teeth.

"Good evening, Mr. Bole, and Madame!" The usher bowed.

"We thought, Mr. Bole . . ." the manager suggested.

"If you prefer, sir . . ." The headwaiter yielded.

Rand's choice was a table on the south side of the cavernous dining room beside a window overlooking the first deck of verandas that bordered the garden in the inner court. The headwaiter in person held Mrs. Bole's chair, and two waiters hovered over them. Heads came together at the tables around them, and more lips formed the words, "Bole—oil." A sea of white napery, black coats, and rainbow hues of gowns stood out in relief against dark wainscoting. The light from great brass chandeliers was caught in silver and crystal, jewels and wine.

Supper at the United States Hotel! Here were capitalists with that intent look in their eyes, and between them at the tables were the high stakes of mines and timber, railroads and coal; invisible stakes, but there. Here were cold-eyed bejeweled dowagers and plumply serene matrons from the back country with carefully displayed marriageable daughters. Here were sporting men and exotic actresses, politicians, horsemen with talk of the track and paddock, gamblers with ears attuned for

the carelessly dropped word. Here were invalids taking the waters, wan and listless, rubbing shoulders with the boisterous and bawdy. Here were the primly virtuous, cheek by jowl with the hard-eyed and sinister. *And here was Molly Bannon, daughter of Mike Bannon from the Bannon House.*

The Bannon House . . . Even the thought of it here was as alien as the little hair trunk Molly had brought from there, which was in the far corner of a closet in her dressing room at Bole Hall, with her ring of keys in it, the pistol, and the starched gray calico dresses. The breeze through the window from the garden turned suddenly cold as over Molly swept the certainty that the clock must strike and that she would find herself going up the spike-pocked stairs again, a pitcher of water in one hand, the ring of keys in the other hand, and the pistol in the folds of her skirt. Her eyes came back to Rand, but Rand sat across from her, handsome, assured, and smiling.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mrs. Bole!" he said.

Yes, this was Rand—this one. Molly tossed her head. She said, "A penny for my thoughts? Indeed, Mr. Rockefeller!"

Rand chuckled. His glance traveled idly beyond her, and then he stiffened slowly in his chair. The intent look came into his eyes; his face turned impassive and rigid. He nodded in casual recognition; and, following his glance, Molly saw John Archbold two tables away from them; John Archbold and Sam Dodd, the young round-faced and mettlesome lawyer who had inveighed against monopoly in the Pennsylvania legislature with such telling fire that Rockefeller had hired him. He was now attorney for the Standard Oil Company. Molly's eyes came back to Rand, laughing.

Mr. Rockefeller abjured his men to live simply and without display, lest any show of wealth should encourage competition, and Molly said, "The champagne must be an investment!"

Rand's eyes were opaque. A cold little smile played around his mouth. His voice was gentle when he said, "Oh, beyond a doubt!" Then they were getting up from the table, those two. They were coming Rand's way. They stopped at the table, and Rand rose from his chair. They shook hands—Rand,

handsome, smiling, and assured; John Archbold, shy and scholarly but effervescent and at ease. Somewhere a line of six-inch pipe was crawling coastward along mountainsides now so steep that heavy sections of pipe had to be lowered by cables. If it worked, that line, it would lay an oil empire on the table between these two men. Grave, John Archbold looked from Molly to Sam Dodd.

"Sam, we've pursued a radiant invalid to Saratoga," he said. "Could the lady be pulling her husband's leg?"

Pursued an invalid? Her heart stood still—and plummeted. The lights dimmed, and the table dipped. The great dining room whirled, a tossing sea of napery and silver and crystal, dark wainscoting, bright-hued gowns, black coats, jewels. In it were eyes, eyes and lips forming the words, "Archbold . . . Bole." It was only a split second before Molly said with the smile fixed on her face, "John, *must* you give me away to my husband?"

"And surely Rand wouldn't think of paying Sargent to paint your portrait, Molly!" John Archbold derided such business practice. "Sargent should pay him."

"Alas, John!" The corners of Molly's mouth turned down. "My husband is not Mr. Rockefeller."

He smiled in delight at the thrust. Then, his eyes bland, he said, "Molly, if you'll keep it a secret, I'll tell you what Sargent said when he painted Mr. Rockefeller's portrait."

Molly glanced obliquely around them, wary. She said, "Shhh! Somebody will hear you, John. And Mr. Rockefeller is your staff of life."

He laughed outright, and Sam Dodd's eyes danced. Theirs was the indulgent good nature of men sure of the outcome.

"John," Sam Dodd said, doubtful, "why don't we concede this one by default?"

"Why, victory's in sight, man!" John Archbold scorned retreat. "Because Sargent said, Molly, that Mr. Rockefeller has the eyes of a saint."

Her hands locked tight in her lap, Molly looked up at Rand, aghast.

"Rand dear!" she scolded. "How *much* is Sargent's fee?"

Watching John Archbold, Sam Dodd began to count slowly toward ten. He sighed, "John, I warned you, and you led with your chin."

His eyes amused but rueful, John Archbold stroked his chin as he said, "Oh, come, Molly, let's be friends. You'll waltz with me after supper, won't you?"

"No waltzing!" Rand spoke, concerned and authoritative. "It's early to bed for the lady."

"Besides, I might step on you, John, and——"

"*Again?*" Sam Dodd inquired. "But my man is down, madam!"

Molly looked at John Archbold, quickly contrite. She said, penitent, "Will—will the price of oil go down, John?"

Still stroking his chin, John Archbold said, "What would be your guess, Molly?" And her head tilted to one side as she summed him up, Molly said ruefully, "I guess it will!"

"As it should!" John Archbold eyed her with severity.

"But only temporarily, John." Molly's smile was confident again.

"John, can't you learn?" Sam Dodd shook his head. Bowing to Molly, he took John Archbold by the arm. "Just let me drag my man back to his corner, will you?"

"At least temporarily?" John Archbold yielded with a twinkle in his eye. Then he turned to Rand. "But you and I are still friends, aren't we? How about a cigar with us after supper?"

"I'll meet you on the front porch." Rand was affable and urbane.

They were gone then. A waiter set a plate before Molly, and in the whirling maelstrom she saw a flickering blue flame. Across from her Rand's face was a wavering blur of intent eyes, rigid facial muscles, and the cold little smile. There were the eyes and the moving lips around them. Molly picked up a fork. She tasted orange juice and cointreau. It was crêpes suzette on her plate. The orchestra played "Vis à Vis" by Faust.

She left Rand at the foot of the winding stairway in the buzzing lobby. With the eyes at her back, she turned at the bend, a shimmering figure in lace and diamonds, to smile down at Rand. He towered head and shoulders above the supper crowd as he turned toward the porch. She reached the top of the flight, the long dim hall. Then she was running, breathless; running and sobbing, dry-eyed, as she ran.

RAND SAT SMOKING IDLY WITH ARCHBOLD AND DODD in a corner of the Broadway veranda; idly, but like a prize fighter taking his adversary's measure out of the corner of his eye before the gong sounded. Along the veranda railing were porch boxes overflowing with petunias and geraniums, trailing vines. Beyond them were the alternate lampposts and elms arching the avenue down which paraded jockeys and paddock touts, pimps, croupiers bound for the Casino, black-gowned madams with their clusters of overblown girls, gamblers and sporting men in broad checks with their bedizened and bejeweled trollops.

Along the veranda the cold-eyed dowagers and the plump pink-cheeked wives of prosperous merchants from the back country nodded alike in their chairs, replete with a twelve-course supper, while the orchestra played in the cleared dining room for the daughters to dance the schottische and polka, the waltz and quadrille reel. Somewhere in a near-by field the members of a religious sect convened under a spreading tent and, roused to fevered fervor by the evangelist's exhortations, chanted hymns.

Archbold opened casually, but he was Rockefeller's ace conciliator. With every word he would be playing with the strings, and suddenly one of them would tighten. Lounging in his chair, his knees crossed, Rand blew a smoke ring. Archbold was, he said, a confirmed reader of the *Bradford Era* and an admirer of the fiery and effulgent Colonel Ekas, ye editor, who shook his fist so wordily under Rockefeller's nose. And surely Miss Flora Grey was without her peer!

"What's this about Coon Frisbee's wife and her dishes?" he wondered.

"She's painted the family crest on 'em," Rand said. "It seems she goes back to Henry of Navarre."

"Her mother was a mighty good cook," Archbold remembered. "I put up at her boardinghouse on the Creek. Trail's End, she called it."

"You were a roustabout, weren't you?" Rand remembered.

"A shipping clerk," Archbold said readily. "What do you hear from Abby?"

"She's still farming the old place. She bought it when the sheriff took Matt Dwyer over. She writes to Molly."

"Oh, by the way," Archbold said, reminded, "how is Matt Dwyer?"

"Matt Dwyer?" Rand examined his cigar. "Dwyer is hopelessly paralyzed."

"Tsk! Tsk!" Archbold shook his head. "They go to the well once too often, don't they?"

"Do they?" Rand said.

"And Petty?" Archbold said. "She spends most of her time in New York, doesn't she?"

"According to Miss Flora Grey," Rand said.

"Let me see—didn't somebody tell me Petty maintains an apartment in New York?" Archbold searched his memory.

"Suite 3 in the Dakota." Sam Dodd supplied the data. "Central Park West and Seventy-second Street."

"I thought I saw her riding a black Arabian mare in the Park," Archbold said.

Yes, Rand had figured him out. Talking idly, playing with the strings, Archbold had suddenly drawn one of them tight. Between words Archbold was saying, "*When you come with us, certain things won't go, my boy. That's not the way Standard Oil was built.*" Under the spreading tent they chanted, "Why should I doubt Thy grace?" The orchestra played "The Bells of Corneville." In his mind's eye Rand saw a grave young man with drooping eyelids in black broadcloth, reading from the Scriptures by the light of the fire in a cabin on the Creek.

And again that man was saying, "Come, boy!" Rand turned to Sam Dodd.

"For your records," he said in a frozen fury, "the black Arabian mare is Fatima, sired by Sinbad."

But Archbold was done with that string. He smoked in pregnant silence, watching the motley parade down the elm-arched avenue. Then he drew another string tight.

"You're letting your oil run on the ground, I hear," he said.

"Until I get my tanks built." Rand whisked the ashes from his cigar into a flower box. "And until the Seaboard Pipeline goes through."

"It's eight to three on the Exchange that the line won't work, isn't it?" Archbold examined his cigar.

"It's seven to five today." Rand let him in on the latest wire. "We laid three thousand feet of pipe yesterday."

"Think it will work, do you?" Archbold was amused.

"I know damned well it will!"

"Rockefeller doesn't agree with you."

"Oh well"—Rand dismissed Rockefeller—"he never originated an idea in his life."

"One idea, Rand," Archbold reminded him. "The idea of putting quality kerosene on the market at a stable price."

"And, damn him, did he ever produce a barrel of oil?" Rand tossed his cigar over the railing and sat up in his chair.

"He does a good job of refining it." Archbold smoked on, contained. "He's furnished your market and your transportation."

"And we've furnished his oil at his price!"

"You've made the price what it is, Rand."

"And we'll make it from now on!"

Patently, then, Archbold pulled another string, pointing out Rand's error. The stock in the Seaboard Pipeline was too widely distributed. No one man or no united group of men controlled it.

"And you fellows have never yet stood together," Archbold reminded him.

"I got 'em together, didn't I?" Rand asked him. "And, by God, I'll keep 'em together!"

Archbold let it hang in the air between them, smoking on, until he said casually that if the Seaboard Pipeline should work, by any chance, the Standard would, of course, build a competing pipeline to the coast, if necessary, but it would be too bad for the producers. The competing markets for oil would only encourage them in outproducing consumption and bring on ten-cent oil all the sooner.

"Speaking of the wide distribution of the stock in the Seaboard," Rand inquired, "where would you get your oil?"

That smoked Archbold out, by God. He came out with it. He said, "We thought we might buy Lennon Oil."

Cool as a cucumber, he laid his cards on the table. They would buy Lennon Oil and, with it, its stock in the Seaboard Pipeline. Rand could have its price in cash or in stock in the Standard Oil. If he took the stock they would make him a director in the Standard.

"Our advice would be to take the stock, Rand," Archbold said. "And we'd like to have you with us."

The goddamned pirates! Rand got up from his chair, forcing himself to stand there, stretching idly as he said, amused, "Gentlemen, in two years' time your Standard stock won't be worth ten cents on the dollar. Lennon Oil? It isn't for sale. Lennon Oil belongs to me, and it will continue to belong to me."

"You mean to Mrs. Bole, don't you?" That was Sam Dodd with the data again, and Rand's whole frame vibrated with rage even as his face remained impassive. Only the nerve twitched in his cheek when he turned to Sam Dodd.

"To Mrs. Bole, yes!" He looked Sam Dodd straight in the eyes. "And we find it a convenient arrangement. That is, if you don't mind." He turned to Archbold. "Anything else, John?"

"Just this much, Rand." Archbold got up from his chair, and they faced each other there in the dim corner of the porch. This was Archbold, the slippery adversary with the deft reach. "We're moving in on oil. You'd better sell and come with us."

"And if I don't?"

"It's Rockefeller or the producers, Rand." Archbold didn't so much as raise his voice. "It can't be both. In six months' time we'll have all the oil properties we want and the control of the Seaboard Pipeline with them."

"You will?" Rand was affable and amused.

"Think it over, Rand." This was Archbold, the faithful friend. "Why don't you and Molly talk it over and—"

Rand's hand on his shoulder stopped him. Rand included Sam Dodd in his tolerant glance, and his voice was jovial.

"Gentlemen, my compliments to Mr. Rockefeller," he said, and his voice was gentle. "After all, he's taken a couple of good men over, *but he'll never take Rand Bole. I'll see him in hell first.*"

He turned on his heel and left them there. He walked through the lobby to the veranda bordering the inner court and stood there in the shadows with every nerve in his body raw and quivering, white to the eyes with fury. So they thought they'd buy Lennon Oil! And they thought, by God, they'd send him running to his wife with the offer, letting him know that their records on him were complete, hinting about changes when they took him over. Come, boy!

The candles in the festoons of lanterns had burned out, and moonlight sifted down through the elms upon petunias, alyssum, and mignonette, wet with dew. A hymn from the spreading tent mingled with the lilt of violins in waltz time. *One-two-three. One-two-three. One-two-three.* His face twisted in rage, he turned toward the stairs leading to the second deck of verandas, and there was just one of him now, handsome and assured, inwardly raging as he walked briskly along the veranda. By God, he'd show them who was Lennon Oil!

He opened the door of the sitting room of their suite and stopped dead. He shut the door then carefully behind him. Molly was there in that dour little room with its black walnut and yellowish walls. She sat on the stiff high-backed sofa, her hands locked in her lap, and the diamonds caught the gaslight

filtering through the frosted globes overhead. He walked to the center of the room and stood looking down at her. She looked up, dry-eyed, and when she spoke her voice was dull and hopeless even as it begged him to deny what she said.

"Rand, you weren't all—mixed up, were you? You knew the way, didn't you, and you—you took it."

"And what am I to you but a tool?" His voice swept over her with outraged manhood in it. "An errand boy John Archbold would send running to you with an offer to buy Lennon Oil."

"Yes, that was it. You thought I—I'd sell you out, and—and you brought me here."

And what if he had? Once he had been a man, and what had she made of him? A pimp at the mercy of running tongues, the laughingstock of barrooms. His face was livid, wrung.

"Will you sign Lennon Oil over to me?" His voice lashed at her with the swish of a blacksnake in it and promise of more to come.

She looked up. Then her eyes dropped from the diamond stud to his burnished patent-leathers. They were custom-made but too big and too long. There was that same crease across the toes. She looked up again, and her eyes were bright with her first tears.

"I—I can't, Rand," she said.

He paced the floor, raging like a caged animal hurling itself against bars. And she still thought, in God's name, that Lennon Oil was her few paltry dollars! Lennon Oil—his lifeblood. She would hold it in a death grip, bleeding him white. For that he had brought her from the Bannon House, Mike Bannon's daughter, to Bole Hall. He stopped to stand looking down at her.

"Will you sign Lennon Oil over to me?" The blacksnake whistled with blistering welts in the sound of it.

"Rand, I—I can't."

But her breath came shallowly now. The pulse pounded at the base of her throat. His hot savage rage rolled over her in engulfing waves; the blacksnake whistled in the air. His voice

resounded, harsh and unsparing, in the grim little room. The last man in the street had used Rand Bole's name for a byword, by God! Rockefeller's last chore boy had tried to get to Music Mountain over his head. No man that lived would hold the whip hand over him, and no Irish chambermaid from the Bannon House.

She looked up with the depths of loneliness in her eyes. They dropped to her hands twisting in her lap. But she sat there, wordless, clothed in some invisible armor, unyielding, and a mad impulse gripped him: the impulse to take that slim, pulsing throat between his two hands, tightening them until, breathless, she surrendered to him his own. The impulse died slowly, leaving cold sweat behind it and more subtle spawn. The cold little smile played around his mouth as he looked at his watch and from the watch to her.

"I can just make that New York train." His voice was cool now, impersonal and detached. "Any message for your friend, Mrs. Preston?"

"No—nothing." She brushed her hand across her eyes as if to shut the sight of him out. "Rand, we—we can't quarrel now."

"Quarrel?" His glance went to the bedroom door standing open and came back to her, hard, mocking, and amused. "Quarrel? After all, why should we? You've got your choice, haven't you? *And I'll take mine.*"

THE SEABOARD PIPELINE CRAWLED COASTWARD while autumn lingered in a glory of gold and crimson and bronze against the green of hemlock over hills that rolled away to the horizon in a blue haze. The line crawled coastward as winter struck, locking the valley in ice and snow. Carriages gave way to cutters, and sleigh bells jingled merrily along all but the oil-slimed roads in the hills where the mud never froze and where horses heaved under the whip in deep-grooved wheel ruts.

The "season" had opened with a ball at Bole Hall which taxed even Miss Flora Grey's brimming cache of adjectives. Mindful of her wide audience of wives of pumpers and roustabouts, drillers and tool dressers, Miss Flora went into inspiring detail. Who knew at what number the spinning wheel might stop next? Rockefeller, himself, was the son of a medicine man who sold cancer cure. John Archbold had been a shipping clerk on the Creek, hadn't he? Rand Bole and Coon Frisbee had been teamsters. The mud, the shanties were for a time, and then . . .

"Bole Hall," wrote Miss Flora, "embodies all that is finest and best in a modern palatial residence with its supreme excellence as an ideal abode and perfect home. It is not like many American palaces, built to exist in loneliness. It is a scene of constant social enjoyment and is famed among its charming guests."

Miss Flora squeezed her audience in among the charming guests, and from the very portals.

"The main hall," she wrote, "with its vaulted ceiling of stained glass, is wainscoted to the height of ten feet with rare

Siena marble. The floors are of Italian marble mosaic in soft yellow and green colorings. It has an effect of elegance and extent that impresses it upon all visitors. The massive mantel of Numidian marble adds to its charm. The woodwork is of American quarter-sawed white oak, finished in ammonia silvery gray, and heavily carved with massive columns and consoles. The design and furnishings of the hall throughout are of Italian Renaissance. The walls are hung with rich silk in Tuscan red. The hall and drawing room are separated by a massive arch of carved oak supported by four carved columns."

Gather up your trains, ladies, and on to the drawing room!

"It is modeled from the period of Louis XV," Miss Flora wrote. "The woodwork is old ivory with gold. The ceiling is in bas-relief, representing sunrise and morning-glories. The mantels are white marble, their heavy carved consoles supporting mirrors extending to the ceiling."

Ah, yes, truly exquisite! But to the French ballroom to dance the waltz, the quadrille lancers, the polka and schottische, with the cream of oildom to music imported from New York.

"The wainscoting of the entire room," wrote Miss Flora, "is formed of mirrors surrounded by carved framework and panels in old ivory finish. The ceiling and the walls above the mirrors are frescoed in one delicate blue cloud with a faint suggestion of cherubs and garlands of roses. The hangings are of blue velvet."

And your gowns, ladies? Your gowns and your jewels? Come the time, you must rely upon Maison Worth and upon Tiffany's. For Miss Flora—alas!—had to vie for space with ye editor, the fiery and effulgent Colonel Ekas, in his editorial tirades against Mr. Rockefeller. She was forced to confine herself to general effects, choosing sparingly at that.

Mrs. Rand Bole's beauty was delicately sculptured with a classic repose. Mrs. Luke Jones's beauty was regal. Mrs. James Preston—nee Pleasance Dwyer—was ravishing; Mrs. Coon Frisbee's personality was many-faceted, with her artistic leanings predominant in her toilettes.

"Among the out-of-town guests," wrote Miss Flora, "were

Mr. and Mrs. John Archbold and Mrs. Preston, if we can call our own Mrs. Preston an out-of-town guest, although she has left us again for New York. What has New York got that we lack, Mrs. Preston?"

And even as newsboys, mittened, muffled to the eyes, with the asafetida bags around their necks to ward off disease, tossed Miss Flora's question onto snow-swept stoops, Mrs. Rand Bole opened the door of her boudoir at Bole Hall to see Phoebe, a parlormaid, standing there.

"Dr. Olds is in the library, ma'am," she said. "The young one."

Dr. Jim? A sick tool dresser whose family faced want, probably, or a teamster who'd lost a horse. Molly took her purse from a desk drawer. The purse was in her hand when she opened the library door. Dr. Jim Olds stood with his back to the fire, and there was something rigid in the set of his shoulders. The bisque shepherdess on the mantel looked over one shoulder, and over the mantel above his head hung the portrait by Sargent.

Dr. Olds was an ugly, vital man with a bristling mane of carrot-red hair and a bitter twist in the set of his mouth. He'd come back from school with a flaming zeal in his eyes, but the flame had died to a dogged flicker, quenched by weariness. *Vaccinate? Inoculate a child with germs? Over a mother's dead body!* He crossed the room to shut all the doors. He said, "Can anybody hear us?"

He drew a chair close to hers by the fire and sat for a minute looking around the room. His eyes came back to her, a slight figure in a dark red merino gown, with her hands holding the purse in her lap. He held onto himself against a rising tide.

"I've just come from the Bannon House," he said. "Your father is a very sick man."

Her father, but—*can anybody hear us?* And there was mounting horror in his eyes. Molly's heart faltered; her hands gripped the arms of her chair as her eyes, holding his, asked the question.

"Yes!" He bit it out. "Your father . . . Simon, the Jew peddler . . . a barkpeeler . . . two roustabouts . . . a pipeliner by the name of Maguire."

He ran his hands through his hair as he walked the floor, the mounting horror in his eyes.

"And the place is packed to the attic." His voice was stretched taut. "Drillers, tool dressers, barkpeelers, the help. They smelled it, and they've barricaded themselves in their rooms. I've got Murphy on guard with orders to shoot. . . . Good God, it's like something out of Dante."

He tried to think as he walked. How far would it go? Who had brought it and from where? Simon? A tramp driller or barkpeeler? How many, in God's name, had they breathed upon? How many hands had touched what they touched? Or could it have been Mike Bannon himself? The thing came from filth, and the place crawled with vermin.

"What have we got to fight with?" he said through his teeth. "Two of us, and Dad—he's all in. And what do they care, these hordes that swarmed into the valley? They came to plunder, here today and gone tomorrow."

His eyes swept the room. He said, "Oil! My God—oil! Oil and filth . . . panic . . . disfigurement . . . death."

"There—there's money." Molly's hands clutched the purse in her lap.

"Money! Good God!" His voice broke.

"Money, yes! Medicines, warm blankets, food."

A note in it caught and stung. Flushing, he stood looking into the fire as he said doggedly, "I came to say that I'll take the Bannon House for the pesthouse. Dad will have to keep going outside. Maybe Stafford can come from Buffalo if it gets beyond us. Stafford or Griswold." He looked up from the fire to Molly clutching the purse, and his face softened. "You'd better run for it, Mrs. Bole. *The thing is coming.*"

He left her at the foot of the marble staircase. He stood for a minute with his eyes on the inscription carved into the Numidian marble of the mantel:

*On easy terms with Law and Fate,
For what must be, I calmly wait
And trust a path I cannot see.
That God is good sufficeth me.*

The set of his mouth was still bitter. The hopelessness, the mounting horror, the vision of panic and certain holocaust were in his eyes, but, flushing, he said, "I'm sorry—because it was you."

The grilled doors swung to behind him then, and she was running up the marble stairs. She jerked the bell rope shakily, and when Phoebe came she said, "Tell Thomas I'll want the sleigh in twenty minutes, Phoebe."

"In—in this weather, ma'am?"

"What a grandmother you are, Phoebe!" Molly smiled. "I won't be out long, and—hurry, please."

She dragged the little hair trunk from the dressing-room closet, laid the pistol and the ring of keys on the dressing table. The starched gray calico dresses she folded hurriedly into a bag with the stout shoes and flannel petticoats. She drew the fur-lined carriage boots on over her fragile slippers, adjusted the sealskin toque and tied the veil. Slipping into the sealskin cloak, she tucked the keys and pistol inside the tiny barrel muff.

Anxious, Phoebe carried the bag, and as their hurrying steps echoed together in the well of the stairway Phoebe said, "You—you're warm enough, ma'am?" Shivering under her shawl, she followed Molly across the wind-swept veranda to the porte-cochere, and the stinging wind wrapped the black taffeta skirt around her. His collar turned up and his breath a white cloud, Thomas wrapped the fur rugs close around Molly as he said, "Twenty below, ma'am, and falling fast!"

Full of mettle in the cold, their mouths and nostrils hoary with frost, fighting the tight rein arch-necked, the trotters stepped high down the drive that wound through the park, and the silver sleigh bells rang out merrily. The trotters turned between the stone pillars into Congress Street, passing other bells and other sleighs homeward bound before the blast gather-

ing force in the hills. The sun, beginning to drop behind the ridge, was a great orange ball overlaid with thickening leaden clouds, and the pines, moaning, bent low.

Thomas drew up in front of the Exchange, and Molly said, "I won't be long, Thomas." She left him hunched into his collar to hurry through the deserted lounge. The Exchange had closed for the day. Moffat came forward in the outer office, gray-haired and discreet. He said, "Mr. Bole is occupied for the moment, ma'am. Will you have a chair?" Smiling, Molly said, "And how is Mrs. Moffat?"

"She has had a touch of la grippe." Moffat pursed his lips judiciously. "She's better except for a somewhat disagreeable aftereffect. A rash that—ah"—he couldn't say *itches* to Mrs. Bole!—"makes her most uncomfortable."

"Oh!" Molly's smile stayed fixed. "You—you've had the doctor?"

"As yet, no. But I thought I might——"

"I would, I think, and——"

But the door of Rand's office opened, and a dapper man came out in a black broadcloth overcoat, his shining topper in hand. His hair was parted precisely in the middle, and he wore a pince-nez.

"All right, Mrs. Bole," Moffat said; but, stopping in his tracks, the dapper man barred her way.

"Mrs. Bole?" He bowed low. "You were—ah—pleased with the sapphire pendant? I am Osborne from Tiffany's."

Moffat coughed hurriedly behind his hand. The clerks on their high stools bent low over their ledgers. Molly's smile was quick and reassuring.

"But I've always been *so* pleased with *everything* I've had from Tiffany's, Mr. Osborne!"

Mr. Osborne rocked on his heels, weighing it.

"To be sure, the brooch was a museum piece," he said, "but, as I told Mr. Bole, we are keeping the pendant in mind, and——"

She had to leave him, still weighing it. She closed the door of Rand's office behind her, and Rand looked up from his desk. He rose slowly from his chair, an impressive figure, handsome and assured. His eyes turned hard, mocking, amused.

"Ah!" he said. "Mrs. Bole, I believe? Will you sit down?" He sat back in the swivel chair across the desk from her and, opening a drawer, took out a checkbook. "Not an unexpected pleasure, considering the precedent. How much?"

"As much as—as I can have, Rand."

There was only the scratch of the pen and hard, icy snow, wind-driven, against the windows like the sound of hovering wasps. Rand blotted the check. He sat back in the chair again, his knees idly crossed, and with the check in his hands regarded her curiously.

"How you do like money, don't you?" he said.

"I—I gave it away, Rand." Unconsciously she spoke in the past now.

"The bountiful Mrs. Bole!" His voice was sardonic.

But no pulse pounded in her temple. A curious detachment was upon her. It was as if she stood now outside a world in which she no longer had any part, looking on. Beyond the spell of his voice and his touch, she saw Rand in that world, and—yes!—there were two of him.

One Rand was still that boy on the Creek, grown tall and strong of arm and will, rudderless except for a boy's dream of a bright-haired girl. Yet stray dogs followed him in the street. Horses, whinnying, nuzzled him for the carrot always in his pocket.

The other Rand sat across from her now, handsome and assured, his eyes hard, mocking, and amused. He was afraid. Afraid of hunger and cold, of pinching shoes. He was afraid of the whip hand; so afraid that he counted every denial a challenge. He was afraid to feel, lest, feeling, he would swerve from his ruthless determination to be the man who held the whip. And knowing fear, he knew the power of fear in other men as a weapon.

Somewhere a pipeline crawled coastward. Empire trembled in the balance, and Rand would stand alone now, but there was no time. Murphy stood guard at the Bannon House. *The thing was coming.* Rand laid the check on the polished surface of the desk, and Molly stood up. She tucked the check into her

muff with the ring of keys and the pistol. Wordless, she turned toward the door.

But with her hand on the doorknob she looked back. Rand stood in front of a window against which the storm beat, the snow piling high on the outer sill, and suddenly she tasted tears.

"Rand . . ." she said. "Rand . . ."

There was no answer. She could see only the blurred line of his shoulders in the fading light against the storm, and Thomas waited. She shut the door behind her to hurry, blinded, through the outer office and down the stairs. Thomas paced beside the trotters, flailing his arms. His breath a white cloud, he said, "Home, ma'am?"

"No, I want to stop at the Bannon House."

"The—Bannon House?" He lifted the ear flap of his cap.

"The Bannon House, and—and hurry, please."

The trotters stepped high and daintily. The bells rang out. The great orange ball had sunk behind the hills, and only the leaden clouds remained. Lights had come on in shops and saloons, blurred in the driving snow, and from the hills came the mingled chug of engines and moan of the blast in the pines.

Thomas drew up at the hitching rail in front of the Bannon House, its bleak, weather-beaten outline all but obscured by the swirling funnels of snow.

"Don't get out, Thomas." Molly threw back the fur robes as the trotters danced, impatient, and picked up her bag. "You can turn back here."

"I'll go with you, ma'am, and——"

"No, Thomas. This was my home, and—and my father is here."

"But I'll carry the bag, ma'am, and——"

"No, it isn't heavy, and I came to stay the—the night."

The horses danced as, irresolute and anxious, Thomas peered down at her through the snow.

"Good night, Thomas," she said steadily. "I'll send word when I—I want to come back."

Reluctant, Thomas turned back. Twice he reined in to look back, wavering. Then the bells faded into the distance and the

moan of the blast in the pines. The path to the rear entrance was drifted with snow, but she found her way with a sure step. On the back porch, glass crunched in the snow under the carriage boots. Two kitchen windows had been knocked out. She inserted a quiet key in the lock, opened it, and, shutting it softly behind her, stood with her back to it.

The stench like some carrion pungence swept over her. It came down the narrow enclosed back stairway with a man's hoarse shriek above the whistle of the wind through the broken windows. Her eyes adapted themselves to the shadows and turned toward the stairway. The door was open, and at the foot of the stairway lay a man, bearded and burly, grotesquely sprawled. It was Groaner Mack, the drunken roustabout whose head Buckthorn had once bashed against the boardwalk. He lay now in a pool of blood, shot through the heart, and cockroaches swarmed over him.

There was only the soft rustle of skirts as she felt her way through the shadows and along the spike-pocked floor of the hall toward a flickering light from the barroom. Murphy was in the barroom. His gun lay on the bar beside the wavering candle. His ruddiness had faded. The pasty pallor of his face in the shadows was at eerie odds with the fringe of red whiskers. The bottle stopped halfway to his mouth, and his eyes bulged onto his cheeks as they looked along the barrel of the pistol.

"Put the bottle down, Murphy." It was coolly resolute, and the pistol over his heart was steady. "A dead man can't hinder me. A drunken man will."

Murphy set the bottle down slowly; his hands went high over his head, shaking there as if with the palsy. Then Murphy began to jibber.

"They rushed me, damn them! They rushed me, with Mike Bannon on his back, and him shrieking for a priest. They rushed me, and I shot the first one—may he roast in hell!—but they kept coming at me, damn them, and—and *they're gone!*"

They were gone, and the Thing was smallpox.

THEY HAD RUSHED MURPHY, SCATTERING LIKE bleating sheep before a prowling panther, but they went back to the Bannon House: on stretchers. Some of them shrieked in fevered delirium. Some of them, conscious and cursing, fought the ropes that tied them down. Some of them were inert and stinking masses of fountainous itching sores.

And in their wake, the Thing crawled impartially along Congress Street and Pig Island, past mansion and shanty and brothel, reaching invisible tentacles through locked doors and windows to fasten upon mother and child, harlot and workman. A child sniffled, fever soared, and a mother watched, praying frantically and in secret. The sniffle subsided and hope kindled, but the faint rash came or the cluster of tiny pimples. The father, wet with cold sweat, brought the whip down on a hurriedly saddled horse. Dr. Olds rode up—the old one—drugged with sleeplessness, to climb wearily down from his spent mare.

His eyes, dulled but still knowing, lingered only briefly upon the rash, the cluster of tiny pimples, and turned to the father. The father, blanching, breathed, "Christ!" The doctor left, the child was bundled into blankets, the dead wagon drove up, and two rigid-faced men came in with the stretcher. The father held the mother back by force then as, fighting like a she-bear against the pack for her cub, she sobbed, "Oh God, let me go. Make them take me too."

Miss Flora Grey sat stunned and idle at her desk. Colonel Ekas, ye editor, turned his battery of words from Rockefeller to stem the panic that swept over the valley like a tidal wave. The Erie coaches bulged with the fleeing. Frantic mothers

held children high in their arms as they went up the steps of the coaches to keep them from under trampling feet and, once inside, held them whimpering up to the windows to wave good-by to fathers on the platform. And the Thing crawled on.

Two of the stretcher-bearers were Captain Luke Jones and Happy Clark, a one-eyed driller. Two more were Sam Spellacy and Ike Nolan, whose Golden Fiddle Free Concert Saloon had closed its doors for lack of patronage. Coon Frisbee went back to teaming, and Simmons, Mrs. Coon Frisbee's English butler, went with him. In the dead of night and under a canopy of stars, Coon backed the team and wagon up to the rear entrance of the Bannon House. He and Simmons loaded the sealed coffins into it, covered them over with the tarpaulin. Coon's blacksnake whistled through the air, and the horses, steaming, strained into the collars toward Oak Hill. There Coon and Simmons lowered the coffins into graves hurriedly gouged in the frozen ground, their shadows long across the snow and newly turned earth in the light of their twinkling lanterns.

"Simmons," Coon said through chattering teeth, "I don't like that long-lipped mug o' yours, and I don't like your brogue, but you Johnny Bulls've got your share o' guts."

"Yes, sir." Simmons dug deep into a mound of earth with his shovel. "Thank you, sir. And I could say as much for you, sir."

Mrs. Coon Frisbee laid aside her tiara and went back to plain sewing. The belt of her sewing machine whirled from dawn until dusk as she ran up stacks of flannelette nightgowns, piles of sheets and pillowcases. At her one elbow, Cordelia Jones cut and tore strips of muslin, and at her other elbow, Melodia Spellacy basted flannelette. In the kitchen of Hotel La Pierre, Jacques Bedour donned his chef's hat and rolled up his sleeves, turning his skill to kettles of soups and bowls of custards. And in New York, Mrs. James Preston wrote a letter which Rand Bole read at his desk, two little lines between his eyes. He read:

DEAR RAND,

When you come on Saturday, please bring the following articles. My jet basque which Auntie will find in the closet in

the second drawer on the left of the short drawers. Don't let her tell you she can't find it; tell her I said to look. Then a box of ribbons on the shelf in between. The box is broken. Then tell Auntie to look in the bureau drawers for my wide sash. The blue one. Then in the top drawers of the bathroom for my curling iron, the one I am always leaving on the window sill. Then bring a package of red bead trimming on the table in the back parlor. The bill from Gorham's was for the cloisonné vases or the cut glass. Please bring all these things.

Rand read it once, and slowly for the second time. He ripped the page in two, tossed the pieces into the wastebasket. Then he fished them out, slipped them into an envelope, sealed it, and rang the bell on his desk. Moffat kept his eyes discreetly down, their lids half closed.

"Take this to Celestia Dwyer on Congress Street, Moffat," Rand said, "and bring back a package."

"Yes, sir." Moffat's step across the soft carpet to the door was silent.

But the door opened again, and Dr. Olds—the young one!—stood there in the doorway. His eyes had sunk deep in his head. There were great blue hollows under them, and in his cheeks. His skin was yellow parchment, stretched taut, covered with carrot-red stubble, and his neck had shrunk in his collar. He sat bolt upright in his chair across the desk for fear that, relaxing, he might drop asleep. More doctors and nurses had arrived. They had ordered him out of the Bannon House to sleep around the clock. He had stopped on his way with word of Mrs. Bole.

"My God, what would I have done without her!" His voice was a dull monotone, but he stared with eyes that ached to close down into a bottomless abyss. "Without her and Murphy!" He looked up to say, dazed, "Maguire will live. Willie Maguire. He'll be marked, but he'll live. And one of Hogan's girls. Kitty Brown. She's on her feet and helping Mrs. Bole in the kitchen. A light case. Maguire's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"I know him, yes." Rand drummed his fingers on the desk, watching their shadow in its polished surface.

"I thought to the last I might pull Mike Bannon through. . . . God, how the man fought to live!" Dr. Olds hesitated, wincing. He looked down at his hat, twirling it in his hands as he said, "And I lost Simon."

"Simon?" Rand looked up from the desk, his fingers still.

"Yes—Simon." Dr. Olds shook his head to clear it, and then something in Rand's eyes, naked for the moment, made him look quickly down at his hat again.

"Christ!" Rand's face tightened.

"He called me to his bed one day to ask me, 'This time I lose, no?'" Dr. Olds spoke jerkily—and gently. "I said, 'You've got me with my back to the wall, Simon.'"

Dr. Olds sat silent a minute, twirling his hat and feeling for words. Then he laid his hat on his knee and shrugged, palms up, quoting Simon. "'I lived, I worked, and I die. For why? I dunno.'" He looked up, saw the white ring widening around Rand's mouth, and looked down again as he said quickly, "He was trying to—to figure it out, that was all."

For a minute there was only the sound of Rand's fingers drumming again.

"I slept for an hour that night," Dr. Olds went on. "Mrs. Bole was with Simon, and she sent Murphy to wake me. Murphy said Simon was dying and wanted to see me—alone."

Dr. Olds was back in the Bannon House beside Simon's bed, his eyes turned inward.

"Simon had got his bearings somehow in the night," he remembered. "He was content. He said only, 'You will write me the will, hein?'"

Dr. Olds's face softened as he sat remembering. Then Rand said, "Is there anything you need?" It brought Dr. Olds back. He looked at Rand, heavy-eyed.

"No—nothing." He ran the palm of his hand over the carrot-red stubble on his cheek and chin. "Money? It's everywhere." His eyes turned to the windows, looking out to the hills, and there was something sweet in the set of his mouth. "We find

it in envelopes they slip under the doors. We find it in rolls of bedding and baskets of food they leave on the porch. It's locking the barn when the horse is gone, but it—it's there, and—"that God is good . . . sufficeth me." "

Rand sat back in his chair, crossed his feet on the desk, and locked his hands behind his head. Somewhere a pipeline crawled coastward. It crawled toward the north central branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad, where the right of way led under a trestle. There could be trouble there. And there were still the echoing chug of engines in the hills, the gas flares, the white puffs of steam, the creak of walking beams. Rand cleared his throat, and Dr. Olds's eyes came back to him. Faint red edged up from Rand's collar as he said, "A lot depends on me at the moment, and I feel I should take every precaution."

He waited, but Dr. Olds rubbed the palm of his hand over the red stubble again, silent.

"In fact"—Rand's jaw line hardened—"I've decided to leave for New York tonight."

Dr. Olds's face closed slowly; so slowly that it was barely perceptible. He got up from his chair to stand shakily beside it while his sunken eyes ran over Rand, around the room, gathering up the picture of Corporal, of the Duchess, the wells on Music Mountain. His voice was still a dull monotone when he said, "There's no denying the danger, of course." He reached the door. He stood there with his hat on the back of his head, turning up his coat collar, and when he spoke there was dull rage in his voice.

"You don't expect me to take the word to Mrs. Bole, do you?" he said. "Because I doubt if—I *know damned well I couldn't tell her.*"

The door closed behind him, and Rand stood at a window, looking out. The pines on the ridges stood straight, but their branches, heavy-laden, hung low. Over all was the deep white silence as if, stricken, the valley had wrapped the shroud of snow around it and lay waiting. No merry ring of silver sleigh bells, no high-stepping trotters, no swinging doors and blare of bands. Only McGinnis walked his beat. His lips were pursed

in a whistle and he swung his stick jauntily, but he hugged the buildings, glancing furtively over his shoulder as he whistled. There would be only those little knots of white-faced, flannel-shirted men, off tour, lingering in front of the Bannon House down along the bank of the frozen Tuna, their eyes clinging to the windows behind which the only signs of life would be doctors and nurses like walking ghosts, swathed in white, gloved and masked and hooded.

Something gripped Rand's vitals and, walking into the wash-room, he leaned over the washbowl, vomiting into the zinc basin. . . . Christ! Then he felt a prickle at the roots of his hair. He hadn't heard the door open. He hadn't heard Moffat's step, but there Moffat stood at the desk with a sketchily wrapped package in his hand. A loop of red bead fringe dangled from one end of it. Moffat was blue with cold. He shook in the grip of a chill, and his eyes watered, but he kept them discreetly lowered, their lids half closed.

"I waited for the package on the veranda, sir." Moffat laid it on the desk and rubbed his hands together. "Mrs. Dwyer is—ah—taking every precaution."

He had reached the door when Rand stopped him, his voice crisp.

"I'm leaving tonight for New York, Moffat. If anything comes up you can get in touch with me as usual."

"At the Hoffman House, sir?" Not so much as a quiver of a facial muscle betrayed Moffat. He turned toward the door, and Rand stopped him again.

"Just a minute, Moffat." Rand cleared his throat. "You've had no word of your wife?"

Surprise flickered across Moffat's face, blue and pinched. He looked up: his watering eyes were naked for the second, and the cold corrosive hate showed through. The hate died slowly, and when Moffat spoke his voice was even.

"My wife, sir? I have word of her every day when tours change at noon."

"When tours change?" Rand studied him.

"Mrs. Bole is at a kitchen window in the Bannon House

then, sir, and we line up. She writes on a piece of wrapping paper with a black crayon and holds the paper against the window. 'Holding her own,' she wrote for me today, sir."

Moffat's eyes dropped again, fixing upon the sketchily wrapped package, as Rand stood there, indecisive, with his hands in his pockets. Rand cleared his throat.

"As I said, Moffat, if anything should come up——"

Moffat looked up. Their eyes met and held, and then Moffat's face began to work, and the hate flared again in his eyes.

"There'll be men here, sir," he said, "and any one of them would crawl through hell for her on his hands and knees."

"That will be all, Moffat!" Flames leaped in Rand's eyes, the whip cracked in his voice, and Moffat bethought himself.

"Yes, sir," he said evenly. "I—I'll keep in touch with you, sir."

The door closed softly behind him, and Rand fell upon the package, ripping it apart. And a rat's nest, if ever he saw one! The paper that wrapped it was an old issue of the *Bradford Era*, and as he smoothed it something caught his eye.

Snug as a bug in a rug, Rockefeller had written a letter which had come somehow within ye editor's ken, a red rag to a bull.

"Rather doubt they will pump oil by the date published," Rockefeller wrote, "and if they do, presume it will result in lower rates of freight, but am not a little skeptical about their doing it. They are quite likely to have some disappointments yet before consummating all their plans in that direction."

And in answer ye editor thundered, "How little doth Mr. Rockefeller reckon of the fiber of these men who battle the rock for its bounty, or of the common bond uniting them with bands of steel, before which monopoly, too long nourished at the generous breast of our valley, shall hurl itself only to perish for lack of sustenance like the fruit on the frosted vine, and 'like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind!'"

The cold little smile played around Rand's mouth. He rearranged the contents of the package in a neat pile: the beaded basque, the broken box of ribbons, the blue sash, the curling iron, and the red bead trimming. He laid the rearranged con-

tents on the paper, based by the beaded basque and topped by the curling iron. In his nostrils was the scent of violets as he wrapped the paper around them with meticulous precision and tied the package neatly with the string.

GRADUALLY THE THING RETREATED BEFORE THE white-robed figures within the Bannon House, fighting back with snarling resurges of strength, but in the end it loosened its tentacles, struck to the heart, and, vanishing, left small visible trace. There were only the pocked faces from which eyes were quickly averted on the street; only a mother here and there who held in tight defensive arms the child that looked like a changeling to her; only the new graves on Oak Hill, covered over with snow; and only the girl at Madam Stoddard's de luxe bordello who held the muzzle of a pistol to her heart and, with her eyes on her reflection in a mirror, pulled the trigger.

Miss Flora Grey, busy again, wrote, "Mrs. Rand Bole returned today to Bole Hall. Welcome home, Mrs. Bole." Colonel Ekas turned his fire again upon Rockefeller. Bands blared once more in concert saloon and dance hall; roulette wheels spun, and poker chips rained down; sleigh bells rang merrily out. The Seaboard pipeline crawled coastward, and the betting odds on the Exchange had changed to six to five. On the strength of it, oil went up ten cents. McGinnis touched his stick to his helmet in gracious greeting to Mr. Osborne of Tiffany's. Miss Flora wrote, "Mr. Rand Bole has returned from an extended business trip to New York. Welcome home, Mr. Bole."

And Mrs. Frisbee donned her tiara for the series of balls and soirees in honor of the Frisbees' house guest, the Count Tullio Ferdinando d'Avignone, whom their daughter, Therese, had met on shipboard on her way home from school in France. Count d'Avignone was Mrs. Frisbee's ultimate triumph. Tall

and lean and meltingly dark-eyed, he wore tails as if he'd been born in them, and born waltzing in them, at that. The scar he wore across his left temple was a breath-taking suggestion of the corsair, and he had a way of looking at all the ladies, regardless of age, girth, or station, that said his life up to that moment had been meaningless. Bowing low, he kissed their hands with such tender grace as made matrons rue wasted years and sent their daughters into shivers of ecstasy.

Yet, fish in water that he was in feminine company, Count d'Avignone showed a preponderant interest in Coon Frisbee himself, and Coon returned his regard unreservedly. Coon slapped the count on the back and called him Toolie. "Toolie," Coon said, "you got a brogue like Simmons." And Coon said heartily, "What you want and don't see, all you got to do is ask for it, Toolie."

"Toolie?" Count d'Avignone was at a loss. "What would be the connotation, sir?"

"The—what?" Coon said.

"The—ah—meaning, sir."

"Hell, you gotta have a toolie, ain't you?" Coon demanded. "He's your right-hand man."

"I'm honored, sir!" Count d'Avignone's smile was warmly responsive.

And when the festivities were over and the ladies had retired for the night, Coon and his toolie invariably repaired to the rathskeller in the Frisbee mansion for a nightcap. Two nightcaps, and Coon slid into the double shuffle, ending with the double somersault and landing on his feet. Two more, and Coon sang:

*"So they drilled and they drilled and they drilled some more,
And drillin', m' lad, is a he-man's chore.
Oh, ne'er two men in sadder plight
Than them that met a whore one night."*

Count d'Avignone never tired of it. He never tired of hearing Coon talk oil. He weighed Coon's corroding doubt about the Seaboard Pipeline.

"You know the books, Toolie." Coon's eyes clung to the count's. "Can God A'mighty, Himself, pump oil nineteen hundred feet uphill?"

"It's a question, sir." Count d'Avignone was dubious.

He weighed Rockefeller in the balance while Coon belabored him. Coon swore, "The goddamned pirate!" And raising his glass, the count said, "A man with whom you would have little in common, sir!"

"By God, I like you, Toolie!" Coon clung to the carved mahogany railing as he went up the grand staircase while, beside him, the count took the stairs with a casual ease. "God A'mighty, you could handle three fingers, Toolie, in a thousand-barrel tank!"

There were those among Coon's peers who, watching the count dance with the stocky, snub-nosed Therese, who was Coon all over again except for her heavy way with the waltz, decided that Coon was about to find himself on the losing end of a dicker, and with Mrs. Frisbee and Count d'Avignone the parties of the second part, but they held the bright side of it up to Coon in the bar of Hotel La Pierre. Coon verged on the morose again. Staring moodily into his glass, he sang to himself "What Makes the Wildcat Wild?" He left it, tabled for the moment, to buttonhole his peers along the bar, clinging to lapels and fixing them with a scalpel eye as he hiccuped, "You heard what I heard, ain't you?"

They shook him off with, "Christ's sake, what do you care, Coon? You'll be living in a castle, won't you? Yes, by God, and wearing a crown!" They said, "What the hell're you crying about, Coon? You've filled your flush. Those dukes're well heeled, aren't they?" They said, "Even if he's broke, Coon, an A-1 guinea can dig a lot of ditch in a day's time!"

Coon could get only his toolie's ear that night after Mrs. Frisbee's own soiree. It was a select affair. Limited to twenty-four guests, Mrs. Frisbee chose with care. Only the most socially desirable partook of the boned and stuffed squab, served under the blazing chandelier from the service for twenty-four, hand painted with Mrs. Frisbee's crest in gold.

Still verging on the morose, Coon savored little of the rarefied atmosphere himself. His shirt front bulged, the diamond stud gleamed like a locomotive headlight, his white tie was askew, and Coon's woman was only a white blur at the far end of the table beyond the gilt-and-silver epergne; a blur upon which Coon kept an unsteady but wary eye.

After dinner Coon repaired docilely with the guests to the ballroom to sit on one of the fragile gilt chairs while the string sextet rendered chamber music. Precariously perched beside Count d'Avignone, who rode his own gilt chair between Coon and Therese as if it were part of him, Coon napped with his chin on his chest while the violins sang out. When he snored the count nudged him. When he toppled the count's quick hand stayed him. Coon napped on with a warm feeling of security, his meaty fingers interlaced across his stomach.

At the end of the ballroom was a stage with crimson velvet hangings. The violins hushed to a tremolo, there was a trill of harp notes, and the velvet curtains parted to reveal Mrs. Coon Frisbee in the center of the stage in the gown of her own design. It was a white flowing robe, held generously off-shoulder by a wide band embroidered in gold with the Greek key. The long-flowing sleeves were similarly banded. Only a gold cord with dangling tassels confined Mrs. Frisbee's waist, and her high coiffure was held with matching bands of gold. Coon napped on, immune, as she embarked upon *Maud*, a dramatic monologue by Tennyson, to the harp accompaniment.

The applause roused Coon. His head came up. He blinked. Then his woman, graciously yielding with an encore, burst upon his clearing vision. Coon's big ears were a dull burning red as he turned to the count with the shocked whisper, "Christ's sake, that's her nightgown, ain't it?"

"Shhh!" Count d'Avignone advised behind his hand. "It's from the Greek, sir."

And the last departing sleigh bell had barely faded into the night before Coon and his toolie had settled themselves comfortably in the rathskeller. Here Flemish woodwork of dark oak formed the wainscoting, and above it were paintings of

quaint German scenes. In the panels of the woodwork were German mottoes inlaid in white wood. The chairs and tables were of Flemish wood in sturdy Dutch pattern, and handy brass spittoons reflected the firelight. Two nightcaps and the double shuffle. Two more and the "Song of the Whore." Settling into his chair then across the table from the count, Coon regarded him fondly through the thickening haze.

"Hell, I got nothing against th' old country!" Coon hiccuped. "Now you take Simmons, Toolie." Coon bridled. "You say Simmons is a blue-nosed son of a bitch, don't you?"

"I hadn't thought of it, sir."

"You say it, and I'll lay that hide o' yours wide open with a blacksnake!" Coon waggled an admonishing forefinger. "Them Johnny Bulls've got guts, Toolie."

"Quite true, sir!" Count d'Avignone raised his glass. "I was one year at Oxford, if you remember."

"And take you guineas, now!" Coon studied the count through the haze. "You lemme put a guinea on my property, Toolie, and that gang o' mine'd tear 'im apart, but I got nothin' against 'em. Hell, far's I can see, a guinea gives a man a day's work f'r th' money, same as th' next one, and, by God, I like you, Toolie!"

"To our mutual esteem, sir!" Count d'Avignone raised his glass.

"You know th' kind o' man Coon Frisbee hates his guts, Toolie?" Coon scowled darkly. "Rand Bole!"

"Mr. Bole, sir?" Count d'Avignone selected a cigar from the humidor, lighting it. "A fine figure of a man, sir."

"The yellow-bellied pimp!" Coon turned quarrelsome. "God A'mighty, he thinks that hide o' his is hand painted, Toolie! And without that woman o' his——"

"We're discussing a lady, sir!"

"A lady! By God, you're talkin' American now, Toolie! She may be Mike Bannon's daughter, but——"

"Mike Bannon, sir?" Count d'Avignone changed the subject; and, remembering, Coon glanced uneasily over his shoulder as

he mumbled, "I planted 'im six feet down to the inch, me and Simmons, but I'm damned if I'd trust 'im t' stay there."

"I'd say you made a job of it, sir. You and Simmons."

Verging on the morose again, Coon sang "What Makes the Wildcat Wild?" Pondering it, he wept into his glass. "You know what'll happen if the Seaboard don't work, Toolie?"

"I assume the situation will be critical, sir." Count d'Avignone blew a smoke ring.

"Critical!" Coon hiccuped. He stared unsteadily at his toolie. "Chr-r-rist sake—*critical*. Why, that goddamned pirate'll put th' screws t' us, Toolie, and oil'll hit ten cents a barrel." Coon rose from his chair, weaving. He brought his fist down on the table in lieu of an auctioneer's hammer and shot his cuffs.

"Ladieeeeees and gentlemen!" Coon bawled. "What'm I bid f'r one set o' hand-painted dishes? No offer too small to be considered and no bid spurned. Hand painted, ladies and gents, by—"

"Shhhh! The servants will hear you, sir."

"Let 'em hear me! Ladieeeeees and gentlemen! What'm I bid—"

"You'll disturb Mrs. Frisbee, sir," Count d'Avignone warned; and, glancing uneasily over his shoulder, Coon hurriedly subsided, returning to "What Makes the Wildcat Wild?" He glanced over his shoulder again, and his eyes turned cunning. Slyly he opened a drawer in the table, and from a far corner of it he extracted a plug of tobacco. Biting off a generous chunk, Coon restored the plug carefully to its hiding place and softly shut the drawer upon it. Then he dragged his chair around the table, let himself carefully down into it, and, leaning forward, he gripped Count d'Avignone by the lapels, fixing him with a harried eye as he confided, "You know what I heard, Toolie?"

"I'd have no idea, sir."

"I heard Rockefeller's out to buy Lennon Oil and its stock in the Seaboard, that's what I heard, by God!" Coon sat back with his hands on his knees to gauge the effect on his toolie.

Count d'Avignone's forehead creased in thought as he examined his cigar. He said, "A shrewd move, sir."

Coon leaned forward to grip the count's lapels again, demanding, "And what's she gonna do about it? I'm asking you, Toolie!"

"Mrs. Bole, sir?" Count d'Avignone flicked the ashes of his cigar carefully into a spittoon. "I couldn't say, sir."

"You know wimmen, don't you?" Coon tightened his grip. "Is she gonna play along with Bole and his yellow-headed doxy till hell freezes over? I'm asking you, Toolie! Or is she gonna—"

"It's difficult to decide, sir. Quite different in my country, you know."

Let down, Coon sat with his chin on his chest, staring moodily into the fire. Rousing, he spat toward a spittoon and missed. His eyes turned cunning.

"I wish t' hell I knew," he said, "'cause if *she sells*, and it's more oil Rockefeller wants—the goddamned pirate!—and more stock in the Seaboard, Coon Frisbee's got both of 'em. Yes sireeeee! Li'l old Coon'd put a firecracker under Rand Bole's backside, by God, that'd blow 'im back to Pithole, and then Coon'd shove on, and t' hell with it."

"Shove on, sir?" Count d'Avignone looked up from his glass.

Coon's eyes lit with a gleam. He said, "There's more oil where this come from, ain't there? And sure as God made little apples, Toolie! Mebbe Coon Frisbee ain't got his finger on it, but he's the man that c'n find it, by God!"

"Why not take the cash, sir?" The count blew another smoke ring. "Take the cash and—play safe?"

Coon sat there staring at him, his hands on his knees. Tears welled in Coon's eyes. They slipped down his cheeks, and they were from the heart; tears of pity.

"Toolie," Coon said, "you ain't ever seen oil come out of a hole, have you?"

"As I understand it, sir, the oil doesn't always come out."

Coon chortled. He slapped Count d'Avignone's knee. He said, "Hell, who wants a shot at a sittin' duck, Toolie?" With

the gleam in his eyes he sang, "So they drilled and they drilled and they drilled some more——"

But Count d'Avignone got up from his chair and tossed his cigar into the dying fire. Taking Coon by the elbow, he drew him to his feet. Coon stood there, weaving, and his eyes came to rest on the inscription in white wood above the fireplace. Scowling, Coon wondered, "What's that goddamned thing say, anyhow?"

"German, sir. From the *Horst Wessel*. I was one year in Heidelberg, if you remember." Count d'Avignone touched the scar across his temple. "Skilled duelists, sir."

"Hell of a way for a man t' spend his time!" Coon spat toward the fire and missed. He would have burst into song again, but the count said, "The servants are waiting to turn out the lights, sir."

He steered Coon deftly toward the grand staircase. They came to the landing where, branching, the stairs ascended in twin curves to the mezzanine, and Coon turned to survey the spacious entrance hall below. His eyes traveled indulgently enough from one deeply boxed painting to another, set in the panels of the woodwork, but they came to rest upon a marble replica of the Apollo Belvedere on a carved mahogany pedestal and turned grimly hostile.

"Ladieees and gentlemen! What'm I bid for one marble——"

"Mrs. Frisbee, sir," the count warned, and Coon subsided with an uneasy glance over his shoulder.

Count d'Avignone chose the correct ascending curve. He detached Coon from the tails, the bulging shirt and diamond stud. He inserted Coon into his nightshirt and arranged him between the embroidered sheets. He snuggled the satin coverlet up under Coon's chin and stood looking down at him.

"What you want and don't see, all you gotta do—is ask for it—Toolie," Coon mumbled as, turning out the gaslight, Count d'Avignone shut the door softly behind him.

And the next day Miss Flora Grey wrote, crestfallen, "Our distinguished guest has been recalled to his native shores by press of family affairs. *Bon voyage*, Count d'Avignone."

29

THE SEABOARD PIPELINE CRAWLED OVER MOUNTAIN and through valley to the rhythmic chant of high *up* and low *down*. It was March, and the first day of May had been set for the trial run of oil through the line over the hump. It would reduce the cost of transporting oil by a good half—if Bole drove it through, and if it worked. But would Bole get there, and if he did, would it work? That was a question. And the rumor persisted that Rockefeller, calmly resolute, patient, and never-failing, was moving in on oil. Along the bar at Hotel La Pierre they looked the blue chips over with speculation in their eyes, ears carefully attuned for a carelessly dropped word, and uneasiness swept through their ranks. How many of the blue chips had had an offer from the Standard for their property and their stock in the Seaboard?

For if Rockefeller—the goddamned pirate!—could lay hold of enough oil and enough stock in the Seaboard, he'd hold the pat hand again. In control of transportation once more, he'd clamp down, and who wanted to be left on the losing end? Had Taylor and Satterfield of Union Oil had an offer? McKinney? How about Luke Jones and Coon Frisbee? *And what would Rand Bole's wife do?* That was a question.

And there were tension and soul-searching again in the privacy of boudoirs about Mrs. Luke Jones's coming levee for Dom Pedro de Alcantara II of Brazil, who was including the oil metropolis in his visit to the States. How many and which ones would Cordelia Jones choose to present to Dom Pedro? That was a question. Mrs. Coon Frisbee wavered in harried indecision about the role in which she would appear for Dom

Pedro's pleasure—in case she was asked to oblige, of course. Sarah Bernhardt, too, had included the oil metropolis on her tour as the Duke of Reichstadt in *L'Aiglon*, leaving her imprint upon Mrs. Frisbee. But whether to be Sarah Bernhardt as the Duke of Reichstadt or Ellen Terry as Rosamund in Tennyson's *Becket* or Kate Mayhew in *M'Liss*? That was a question.

And at his desk in the office of Lennon Oil, Rand Bole ripped open a letter from New York, glancing at the signature. It was from one Dr. Augustus Waldron, and Rand's eyes narrowed as he read it.

"I found her in an advanced stage of hysteria," the doctor wrote, "screaming for her father. She was incoherent, but I gathered that you were the one to be notified. I administered a sedative and installed a nurse, pending your arrival."

Hysteria? Another of her damned tantrums, and she had taken some fuddy-duddy doctor in! Rand ripped the letter across and tossed it into the wastebasket. In his shirt sleeves, the green shade shoved high, Charlie Todd studied the list of well completions in the *Oil City Derrick*. Charlie—along with the rest of 'em—was buying oil futures in the bucket shop next door on the strength of the Seaboard pipeline, but the line crawled toward the railroad trestle now, and there could be trouble there. Each time the instrument began to click Charlie bent over it, taut.

It was midmorning when Rand fished the letter out of the wastebasket and, piecing it together, read it again. He walked the floor of his office, his forehead lined. Hysteria? Or another of her damned tantrums? The instrument began to click, and he stopped to stand rigid, his eyes on Charlie. Charlie bent over the instrument, but it was only a call from Music Mountain. A fishing job on No. 176. The sand line had let go, dropping the bailer in the hole seventeen hundred feet down. Rand tossed the letter into the wastebasket.

It was dusk when he brought his hand down on the bell. Downstairs the Exchange had closed, and the gong had sounded. Charlie wriggled into his coat and vest. Moffat opened the door, standing there, his eyes discreetly lowered.

"I'm leaving for New York tonight, Moffat." Rand arranged and rearranged papers on his desk.

"New York, sir?" Moffat looked up with a flicker of anxiety in his eyes, and Charlie Todd on his way out stopped dead in the doorway, one ear cocked.

"New York, yes!" Rand studied Moffat, and Moffat dropped his eyes. "You can get in touch with me as usual—if anything comes up."

"At the Hoffman House, sir?" Moffat made sure.

"At the Hoffman House, yes!" Rand snapped; and, reluctant, Moffat turned toward the door, his eyes lowered, as Charlie Todd slid softly out.

The March wind whipped around Rand as he sat hunched in the buckboard behind the trotters clipping smartly along Congress Street. Overhead the sky was a leaden gray, but winter had loosened its grip on the valley. Mountain streams, fresh and swollen, swirled high with their burden of logs, and the shouts of rafters and loggers echoed from hill to hill with the creak of beams and chug of engines. The trotters came to the stone deer beside the clogged fountain, and Rand looked squarely at the white frame house with its bleak show of neglect and decadent gentility. A cold little smile played around his mouth. They had agreed to leave it to Petty, hadn't they?

But the lines had etched themselves deep around his eyes as he packed his grip at Bole Hall. Around him was woodwork of white mahogany, walls hung in plain linen, sturdy and virile pieces in Arts and Crafts design. Behind glass doors in his dressing room hung a gentleman's wardrobe by Mathew Rock. Along shelves beneath were the rows of custom-made boots and shoes of softest leather on their wooden trees. Packing with a meticulous neatness, he glanced toward the door that led to the adjoining bedroom with its frieze of cupids in plaster relief. Good God, how tired he was! Tired to the bone.

He stopped in the midst of his packing to stand at a window, looking out, while his hands jingled the change in his pockets. Through the dusk, derrick lanterns twinkled at him from the hills and flaming gas flares. His glance went to the door again,

and he walked slowly toward it. His hand closed over the door-knob, hesitating. Hysteria? Or one of her damned tantrums? Suddenly the weariness closed in upon him; the weariness and loneliness, a longing so sharp that it cut through him like a knife. His glance went to the door once more. He walked toward it; his hand closed over the knob, hesitating. Hysteria? Hysteria, hell! He turned the knob, *and the door was locked.*

He saw red—a blinding, blazing red. His jaw shot forward. In his savage fury his hand closed over the back of a heavy Morris chair, and the impulse gripped him to shatter the door to splinters. The impulse died slowly, leaving in its wake more subtle spawn. His hand relaxed on the back of the chair. A cold little smile played around his mouth as he jerked the bell rope. There was a tap on his bedroom door, and he opened it to see Phoebe standing there.

"Oh yes, Phoebe!" Affable and urbane, but preoccupied and in haste, Rand closed his grip and locked it. "Just tell Mrs. Bole, if you will, that I'm leaving for New York, and the date of my return is indefinite."

His topcoat over his arm, his black Homburg in hand, he stood waiting with an intent look in his eyes until he heard a tap at the door again, but it was Phoebe.

"Mrs. Bole will be waiting in the library to say good-by, sir," Phoebe told him, "and Thomas will come for your bag."

He whistled idly through his teeth as his step on the marble stairs echoed in the well of the stairway. He opened the library door, laid the topcoat and Homburg on a chair, and stood at attention.

"The president of Lennon Oil," he said, "and your obedient servant, madam!"

Molly sat in a chair by the fire—the same chair in which Simon had sat when he sighed, "A man, he grows tired, no?" Her gown of blue silk shaded into her eyes. She sat with her hands locked tight in her lap, their fingers interlaced, and her knuckles showed white.

"Rand," she said, "this is the week of Dom Pedro's visit."

"Why, so it is!" He walked over to the fireplace and stood

with his back to the fire. For a second his eyes rested on the chair across the fireplace from her, and then they looked down at her, impersonal and detached. "And you feel that we should appear at Mrs. Luke Jones's levee together. Is that it?"

"Together—yes." The pulse pounded in her temple and at the base of her throat.

"Mr. and Mrs. Rand Bole, one and indivisible!" He weighed it, thoughtful. "And otherwise? Tongues will wag. Is that it?"

"You know there's talk, Rand."

"And what do they say?" He was still affable. "They say, 'To hell with Rand Bole! What will his wife do?' That's what they say, isn't it?"

"We can stop it, Rand, if——"

"If I come to heel?" Flames leaped in his eyes. "That's it, isn't it?"

"Rand, I want only to help——"

"Oh, I don't doubt it!" One of his eyebrows went up. "And there is a way, of course. I've mentioned it from time to time, if you remember."

She looked up, and those were the same eyes into which he had once looked along the barrel of a pistol, even as the pulse pounded.

"There's reason for the talk, Rand," she said; and, cool and unwavering, his eyes held hers.

"Yes?" His voice was gentle. "Then sell me out, why don't you? I understand Rockefeller is offering fair prices."

"Because there's one of you I'll always love!" She said it, level-eyed. "Always! And—you-know it."

He walked over to her chair and stood looking down. In her eyes, unwavering, he saw all of it—the weariness, the loneliness and longing. The intent look came into his eyes, holding hers.

"We can appear together," he said slowly, and his voice was vibrant and deep. "We can be Mr. and Mrs. Rand Bole, one and indivisible, on one condition. Or shall we say—on two conditions?"

But he knew before she spoke. He saw the weariness deepen

while the hope flickered on. She dropped her eyes to his shoes, creased across the toes. When she looked up they were soft with tears—and still resolute.

"No, Rand!" she said. "And I wouldn't make another—fair trade."

He saw red again—that blazing, blinding red. Raging, he walked the floor, and the whip cracked in the words that rolled from his tongue. She would still hold Lennon Oil in a death grip while, weaponless, he fought for it, draining him dry. Talk? Let them talk. And talk on, by God! They knew on which side their bread was buttered. At least the Preston woman made return for what she received, and he wouldn't be paraded by Mrs. Rand Bole like a damned cock in a cage.

"Rand, the servants——"

"Let 'em hear me!" His voice rose in ringing fury. "Will you sign Lennon Oil over to me?"

"No—I won't." Her eyes were tearless now and tired.

He stopped in his tracks. He took out his watch, glancing at it. He looked from the watch to her. She sat with her head against the back of her chair, her eyes closed.

"My regrets, then, to Mrs. Luke Jones! Say to the lady for me that there is no one I dislike more to disappoint, although something tells me my regard is not returned in full. And any message to your friend, Mrs. Preston?"

"No—nothing."

He picked up the topcoat and Homburg. He had reached the door when she spoke.

"Rand, there are two of you," she said. "You know it, don't you? And I can't let one of them betray the other. I can't, Rand, and—I *won't*."

He stood there a minute with his hand on the doorknob while the loneliness closed in again; the longing and weariness. He turned then to look back, and his eyes swept the room. They came to rest upon her, a slight figure in a deep chair beside the massive mantel of Rouge Royal marble over which hung the portrait by Sargent. He caught the mingled scents of mignonette and burning applewood. His jaw shot forward.

“You can’t let one of me betray the other one?” The lines deepened around his eyes, hard, mocking, amused. “You won’t? *Neither will I.* One of me cleaned stalls in Fuller’s livery for a night’s lodging, madam! *And the other one built Lennon Oil.*”

MISS FLORA GREY SWALLOWED TEARS AT HER DESK that morning. Now and again she touched a tiny lace handkerchief to nearsighted eyes behind her spectacles as she looked through the murky window of her office into Main Street. On the angular side, perhaps, Miss Flora compensated with ruchings and flounces and just a suggestion of padding in strategic places. Filching ideas from Maison Worth, she made little sketches for Miss Mattie, her seamstress, and Miss Mattie worked the sketches into quite *recherché* creations of merino and bombazine and imitation lace. And Miss Flora's coiffure was the very latest, fashioned as it was after Mrs. James Preston's. Her back hair was drawn high on her head in coils, and while stray wisps were inclined to straggle down over her collar, her front hair was a fluff of curled ringlets. Miss Flora might be a career woman, but she *was* a woman, with all a woman's finer sensibilities: a fact which Colonel Ekas consistently forgot.

Not that she minded the colonel's remark about her spelling on her own account. After all, what was spelling weighed against her style, which she had been years in developing? And her audience knew what she meant. Too, the colonel's rancor had its source in the fact that her audience was just as wide as his—if not wider! No, it was the colonel's vile aspersion on Miss Flora's realm that cut her to the quick.

She had written at rhapsodic length about Selina Lithgow's ball for the younger set; and even as she wrote, she thought how truly the recently announced engagement of Therese Frisbee—the oil Frisbees!—to young Stephen Wetherell—the

timber Wetherells!—heralded one of those matches made in heaven. Love did indeed find a way. Why, there was a time when Mrs. Wetherell wouldn't even receive Mrs. Frisbee! The first break in the ranks of timber augured well for the future.

For here was Therese Frisbee, who had never been in too great demand among the young men at the balls. Sometimes Miss Flora had felt that if Mrs. Frisbee hadn't been so—well, helpful!—Therese might have done better, although maybe not. Everything considered, and except for Count d'Avignone, Therese could never have hoped for so dashing a husband as young Stephen Wetherell but for that blessed accident that was Love. And how truly fortuitous for young Mr. Wetherell that he was inclined to look beneath the surface for more enduring charms than the purely superficial. For the Wetherells' timber holdings were pretty well depleted by now, and young Mr. Wetherell was more the sportsman than the man of affairs.

Writing, Miss Flora had known whereof she wrote, enjoying Mrs. Frisbee's full confidence as she did. Mrs. Frisbee had had nothing against Count d'Avignone personally; nothing whatever. But she had been all but prostrated for fear the count just might sweep Therese off her feet, in which case Therese would have lived in Italy. Mrs. Frisbee hadn't mentioned the matter of a financial settlement, of course. One just didn't mention such things, but in her own mind Miss Flora was quite positive that Mr. Frisbee would have co-operated, and with oil at its present price and the Seaboard pipeline a matter of conjecture . . . As it was, the Frisbees were building a nest on Congress Street for the lovebirds, and Mr. Frisbee was taking young Mr. Wetherell under his wing.

So Miss Flora had meant to write, "Among those present were Mr. Stephen Wetherell and his fiancée, Miss Therese Frisbee." She would never understand just how she had happened to write, "Among those present were Mr. Stephen Wetherell and his *finance*, Miss Therese Frisbee." Not that it mattered. The meaning was clear. But Colonel Ekas said, "Just leave the facts to me, if you will, Miss Flora!"

And it gave the lie to Miss Flora's whole slant upon her

realm; a realm that reminded her of Shakespeare's glorious words, "The cloud-topped towers . . . the gorgeous palaces . . . the solemn temples . . . yea, the great globe itself." The laughter and lace, the marble and gilt and damask and crystal, the personages! In her own little world of fantasy Miss Flora was never Miss Flora. Now she was Mrs. Rand Bole, graciously receiving her guests at Bole Hall with Mr. Bole at her side—such a fine figure of a man, so stalwart and strong and yet so gentle! Again, Miss Flora was Mrs. Luke Jones, wittily vivacious, with people hanging on her changing expression to see which way the wind blew. Again, she was Mrs. Coon Frisbee, the artist in lavish costume, enthralling her audience as Rosamund. But most often, somehow, Miss Flora was Mrs. James Preston, the beautiful and poignant figure in sapphires and breath-taking toilettes.

Facts? Miss Flora sniffed with a resurgence of spunk as she thought of Mr. John Archbold—such a massive personality, and everybody said he'd be the next president of Standard Oil. On one of his visits to the field Mr. Archbold had dropped in on the colonel, and Miss Flora had heard them in the colonel's office across the hall. Mr. Archbold said he and the colonel belonged to different schools of thought, but—

"You used to squeal about monopoly like a stuck pig, John," the colonel said. Miss Flora blushed for him.

"And I still read your squeals, Colonel." Mr. Archbold had such poise! "They let me see myself as others see me."

"That is my purpose, sir!" The colonel invariably lost his temper with Mr. Archbold.

"And a purpose admirably accomplished, Colonel." Mr. Archbold actually chuckled.

"The facts are there for you to read!" the colonel shouted.

"Facts indeed!" Mr. Archbold was calm. "And we differ only in our interpretation of them, but speaking of interpretation, may I meet Miss Flora Grey?"

The colonel's color was choleric when he brought Mr. Archbold across the hall, and he was downright churlish when he said, "Miss Flora, this is John Archbold, *now* of Standard Oil!"

But Mr. Archbold—so shy and scholarly, yet so ebullient!—bowed low over Miss Flora's hand as he said, "I am one of your most constant readers, dear lady. In fact, I invariably read you before I read the colonel!" And long after he'd left, the colonel was still cursing, and the things he said about Mr. Archbold! He said Mr. Archbold was nothing more nor less than one of Rockefeller's pussyfooting spies, with an ear to the ground to see if anybody was making a dollar that could be sidetracked into Mr. Rockefeller's pocket, but let the Seaboard go through, by God, and Archbold would have a tale to carry to Mr. Rockefeller, and the squealing would come from the other side.

Yes, the colonel's acid remark was really a feather in Miss Flora's cap, if she could just look at it in that light, but sensitive as she was . . . She touched the lace handkerchief to her eyes again, looking through the window. Then she stiffened in her chair. That was Mrs. Luke Jones's clarence drawing up out front! The coachman got down to open the door, and Mrs. Jones stepped out. Mrs. Jones was coming in! Flustered, Miss Flora dusted a chair with the lace handkerchief. She ran nervous fingers up her back hair to tuck in the wisps. She was at the door in time to meet Mrs. Jones, but the end of her nose had begun to tickle and, agonized, she sneezed inelegantly.

"And you have brought the list yourself, Mrs. Jones!" Miss Flora sneezed again. "Busy as you are!"

She gave her nose a vicious rub with the fluttering handkerchief as Mrs. Jones settled with a rich rustle into the chair. From her chair at the desk Miss Flora regarded Mrs. Jones in admiring awe. The exquisite Biarritz cloth of Mrs. Jones's walking suit! Miss Flora's fingers itched to take a fold of it between them, testing its fine texture. And the dainty gloves. Alexandre kid, of course. Dust particles formed slanting columns in the sunlight through the murky window to play over yellowing papers stuffed into the pigeonholes of Miss Flora's desk, and Miss Flora said hurriedly, "Such a beautiful day, isn't it? And so perfect for Mrs. Bole to lay the cornerstone for our new hospital!"

"If only she wears a warm cloak!" Mrs. Jones's eyes clouded

over; and, quickly sympathetic, Miss Flora said, "She does seem just a little weary, doesn't she?"

"Do you wonder, Miss Flora?" Mrs. Jones seemed pale and distraught herself.

"Ah, no!" Miss Flora sighed. "But how grateful we should be that she was spared to us!" Miss Flora's mouth tightened as she added with the merest trace of a sniff, "I wanted to write the cornerstone up, but the colonel took it."

"Then you do have time to help me, Miss Flora?" Mrs. Jones took the guest list from her money purse. Handing it to Miss Flora, she sat with the palms of her hands pressed to her temples. "Could you run over it to see if I've left anyone out? My memory is so wretched, and I've been so beset!"

"But of course, Mrs. Jones!" With the responsibility heavy upon her, Miss Flora ran an eye down the list and stopped almost before she'd got started. Aghast, she said, "But the Boles! Mrs. Jones, you forgot the Boles!"

She penciled the Boles in as Mrs. Jones explained, "It must have been because they won't be there. Mr. Bole is in New York."

"Oh no!" Miss Flora winced. How tragic for Dom Pedro to miss the Boles! But with the list in one hand, Miss Flora automatically made a note with the other hand on the pad on her desk. She wrote, "Mr. Bole, New York." She looked up to inquire, "On business, no doubt?"

"Mrs. Bole didn't say in her regrets." Mrs. Jones sat with her forehead in one hand, and Miss Flora ran an eye on down the list. Toward the end she looked up again and, shaking a playful finger at Mrs. Jones, she said, "But Mrs. Preston! We can't forget Mrs. Preston, can we?"

"Indeed we can't!" Mrs. Jones sighed. "Perhaps it was because she's in New York."

"Oh!" Miss Flora winced again for Dom Pedro as she made another note. She wrote, "Mrs. James Preston, New York." Then looking on the bright side, she said, "We shall see more *recherché toilettes*!"

"Ravishing, aren't they?" Mrs. Jones smiled.

"Ah, yes!" Miss Flora sat with her hands clasped on the guest list on the desk as if before an altar. "Ravishing! I remember her wedding. Tsk, tsk—an unearthly bride!" Miss Flora's eyes dreamed. "But surely there is consolation for her somewhere—a gentle husband—but stalwart and strong—and a man of means, of course."

"Good gracious, Miss Flora! You'll have me looking over the captain's shoulder!"

Blinking, Miss Flora came back to the drab reality of the dusty little office. The little joke—quite on the personal side, really!—brought Mrs. Jones close; so close that, catching her breath, Miss Flora ventured, "I never encourage gossip, Mrs. Jones, and——"

"I'm sure you don't, Miss Flora."

"And as I told Miss Mattie just yesterday," Miss Flora rushed on, "I'm in a position to *know*!"

"Indeed you are, Miss Flora."

"And I'm sure there's some quite—quite proper explanation," Miss Flora faltered, "but I understood at the time of Mr. Preston's—ah—untimely demise that he was—was——"

"Insolvent?" Mrs. Jones supplied the horrid word.

"Yes, and that both her father and her aunt were—were——"

"Financially embarrassed?" Mrs. Jones didn't falter.

"Yes, and Celestia Dwyer never receives anybody any more, not even timber——" Miss Flora floundered, agonized at the faux pas.

"Oh, really?" Mrs. Jones wasn't offended.

"So Mrs. Preston *must* have an income of her own, mustn't she?" Miss Flora blurted it out, flushing.

"An income of her own?" Mrs. Jones weighed the words, thinking. "N-no, I wouldn't say so. I believe, Miss Flora, that the Dwyers are entirely dependent upon Mr. Bole."

"Mr. Bole?" Miss Flora's heart stood still.

"He was a neighbor of the Dwyers on the Creek, you know." Mrs. Jones's voice was steady. "And it would be his privilege to aid them."

"Y-yes, of course." Miss Flora's eyes dropped to the pad on

her desk. She saw the words, "Mr. Rand Bole, New York. Mrs. James Preston, New York." In one ear she heard Miss Mattie's whisper hissing through the bastings in her mouth. In the other ear she heard the colonel's irate voice. The office whirled around her, and cloud-topped towers toppled. She looked up and her eyes groped for Mrs. Jones in the whirl. Mrs. Jones sat there smiling, serene.

"I'm being quite confidential, Miss Flora," she said, "but——"

"I—I couldn't betray you, Mrs. Jones." Miss Flora's lips trembled.

"—but I had it from Mrs. Bole herself."

The office steadied around Miss Flora and settled into place. The towers rose high and beautiful into the clouds again, and Miss Flora's face was illumined. She touched the lace handkerchief to her eyes, but no words of hers would touch a relationship so beautiful and tender, so she said, "How do you like the Wetherell-Frisbee engagement, Mrs. Jones?"

For a minute Mrs. Jones looked down at the money purse in her gloved hands. When she looked up her eyes were rueful, and Miss Flora's heart skipped a beat, but Mrs. Jones confessed, "I was one of Count d'Avignone's conquests, Miss Flora."

"And I!" Miss Flora's sigh was wistful. "But sometimes I wonder if those foreigners aren't just a little—well, practical!"

"Practical?" Reluctant, Mrs. Jones considered it, her head tipped to one side. "But maybe they have to be practical, Miss Flora."

"Ah, yes!" The thought saddened Miss Flora. "It just seems a little—well, sordid!—to us, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Jones's eyes dropped to her guest list on Miss Flora's desk. She said, "Can you think of anybody else, Miss Flora?"

"I wouldn't say so." Miss Flora was deliberate and judicial. "If anything, you've been too graciously inclusive, Mrs. Jones."

Mrs. Jones rose then, and the intimate little visit was over. Regretful, Miss Flora walked with her to the door. There Mrs. Jones hesitated, looking down at one gloved hand on the door-knob.

"You are a real force among us, Miss Flora," she said.

Miss Flora's throat tightened. She touched the lace handkerchief to her eyes, and then with a rush she returned Mrs. Jones's confidence.

"The colonel doesn't think so," she said.

"Indeed!" Mrs. Jones dismissed the colonel.

"You're so kind, Mrs. Jones!" Miss Flora made bold to blow her nose. "Always s-so k-kind."

"Kind?" There were quick tears in Mrs. Jones's eyes! "Not always, Miss Flora."

"But you are!" Miss Flora stood wet-eyed but stanch.

"Sometimes I can be—well, quite practical!—with my friends, Miss Flora."

"You could be as practical with me as you liked, Mrs. Jones"—Miss Flora was still loyal—"if—if it would make me your friend."

"My dear!" Mrs. Jones's arm went around her waist then, and Miss Flora's cup ran over. "How very good of you to say it!"

THE DREAM WAS UPON CELESTIA DWYER AGAIN, AND she woke in the grip of it, damp with terror, to lie there, a quaking mound under the bedcovers. It was in the library this time. She had been in the library when she looked up to see Matthew sitting there in his chair under the lamp. He had risen from his chair to loom over her, and a scream swelled in her throat. *Matthew could walk again and talk.*

The terror was still in her eyes now, deeply embedded in the mottled flesh of her face. Slowly it gave way to reality, and she was faint with the relief of it. It was only the dream. Matthew couldn't touch her. He would never walk or talk again, and Petty wasn't there. Celestia burrowed deeper into the feather tick like a giant mole.

It had begun to rain in the night, and the rain still fell in a cold, dreary downpour. Now and again a gust of wind, shrieking around the house, drove the rain in sheets of water against the windows, and the bedroom was a place of shadows and gray half-light, dank and cold. Shivering, Celestia drew the covers up to her chin. The furnace would be low. Perhaps the fire had died out. While the rain drummed on the roof and ran in rivulets down the windowpanes Celestia lay wrapped in thought, her eyes like two half-sheathed daggers.

Matthew had brought her to this. Once she had had only to ring, and the door opened to admit a stout-backed maid. The maid lit the fire, freshly laid the night before. As the fire crackled cozily the maid propped the pillows behind Celestia. She laid Celestia's Paisley shawl around her shoulders. She set the breakfast tray across Celestia's knees. There were hot muf-

fins, dripping sweet butter and plum preserves, so feathery light that they melted in her mouth. There were crisp strips of bacon and there were new-laid eggs poached so that only a delicate transparent film of white veiled the quivering yolks. There was coffee, freshly ground in the mill on the kitchen wall, fragrant and piping hot, floating thick clots of yellow cream. Celestia's mouth watered with the memory, and her stomach rumbled emptily.

Yes, Matthew had taken it—all of it!—away from her. Now it was Petty who rang, and the door of Petty's bedroom opened to admit Celestia. Celestia, teetering on her tiny feet, lit the fire for Petty; she propped the pillows behind her precious niece and laid the breakfast tray across her knees. It was "Auntie, fetch me this." It was "Auntie, fetch me that." And Auntie, dependent now on milady for the very bread she ate and the roof over her head, fetched and carried until it seemed her thudding heart must leap from her breast.

But Petty wasn't there now, and Celestia stretched luxuriously in her feather hollow. There was only Matthew, lying like a log. Matthew couldn't hurt her. He would be thirsty, but Matthew was always thirsty. The rain would come through the leaking roof to fill the blister in the wallpaper on the ceiling in his bedroom. From the blister a drop of water would gather slowly as Matthew lay there watching, to fall, splashing, into the pan she had set beside his bed. Matthew would run his tongue over blue, parched lips. The bright-hued cockatoo in the gold cage on the table beside his bed would croak and beat his wings against the bars, scolding at Matthew.

Celestia drowsed on, snug and warm in her deep hollow of feathers, while the wind lashed the rain against the windows, but in the end her stomach rumbled hollowly, rousing her. She laid the covers reluctantly back, eased her puffy body from the warm hollow to stand shivering in her billowing nightgown of French percale with its hand tucks and lace inserts, relic of better days. The two thin braids straggling over her pudgy shoulders were still a wondrous shade of brown, but the thinning hair next to her head was yellowish-white. The

sagging flesh of her face rolled into her puffy body, quivering as she leaned over to ease the tiny feet into the carpet slippers. She wound herself into the wadded wrapper and shuffled, shivering, down the winding stairs.

In the lower hall she peeked through the curtains on the doors, her eyes darting up and down the street. The lawn was a matted carpet of fallen leaves, and the bare branches of the trees rasped in the wind over the stone deer beside the clogged fountain. Nobody was coming on the street, and the *Era* lay damp and sodden midway of the veranda. Celestia opened the heavy door, slithered through it and back with an incredible swiftness, the *Era* in her hands. It was clutched under her arm as she shuffled through the darkly shadowed library, glancing out of the side of her eyes toward Matthew's chair under the lamp.

The kitchen was cold and clammy. Celestia's breath was a faint white mist as she lit a burner of the kerosene stove, the *Era* still clutched under her arm. At the tap she let the water run into the coffeepot over yesterday's grounds and set the pot on the blue flame. Huddling close to the flickering flame then, she opened the *Era* to turn avidly to Miss Flora Grey, reliving other days. Hm-m-m-m-m-m-m! Miss Flora took on at a pretty length this morning about Mrs. Luke Jones's coming levee in honor of Dom Pedro de Alcantara of Brazil. Celestia ran her eyes down the guest list that would separate the sheep from the goats. Yes, the precious Petty was listed there. Mrs. Rand Bole's fine hand again, foisting her husband's mistress upon her hoity-toity friends, and the precious Petty needn't have scuttled back to New York in terror of Mrs. Luke Jones's raised eyebrows.

Celestia turned from Dom Pedro to Miss Flora's column, headed "Chitchat." Her puffy body suddenly froze as she read, rigid and taut as a setter on point. Ah . . . ha! Well, well! That silly old maid at the *Era* had let the cat out of the bag with a vengeance this time, and Rand Bole's wife had her work cut out for her! A warm glow spread through Celestia. Her eyes lit up. Her hunger and the cold forgotten, she filled a pitcher

at the tap and took the core of a cabbage she'd saved from a window sill. The pitcher in one hand, the *Era* and the cabbage core in the other hand, she padded up the back stairs and down the hall to the door of Matthew's room.

She set the pitcher down to open the door, picked it up again, and teetered there in the doorway. "Good morning, Matthew! A real rain we're having, isn't it?" Celestia prided herself upon maintaining appearances with Matthew. Her voice was a plaintive bleat, fraught with a martyr's cheer. Only the cockatoo croaked in answer, scolding and raucous as he threshed his wings against the bars, and Celestia shuffled toward his cage, cajoling him. "Well, well! He's cross with Celestia, isn't he? But his cup's empty. Poor little bird, he's thirsty, isn't he?" The water gurgled from the pitcher into the bird's cup. He threw his head back, drinking thirstily. Celestia set the pitcher on the table, and the drops of water trickled down the side of it. She held the core of cabbage between her teeth for the bird, tussling playfully over it with him as he pecked.

She turned to Matthew then, and the shudder that ran through her as she looked at him was half concealed. There he lay in the great black walnut bed with its high carved head-board, down to skin and bone, the color of a cadaver, and his body had that rigid, lifeless look under the covers. His beard was matted. His eyes were set in deep-sunken hollows. He kept turning them toward the drop of water trembling pendant from the blister of wallpaper on the ceiling. Matthew was thirsty, but not thirsty enough. He knew how to ask for water. The trouble was that Matthew didn't like to ask. He didn't like to thrust his tongue out, holding it there until Celestia noticed. Always there must be this little tussle of wills, with Celestia preoccupied and the pitcher of water sitting there until Matthew made up his mind to call his thirst to her attention.

Another drop of water splashed into the pan from the ceiling as Celestia settled herself into the slipper chair with the *Era*. She glanced up toward the filled blister of wallpaper, harried by the leak in the roof as she opened the paper.

"Tsk, tsk!" Her burdens were suddenly too much for her. Sighing, she shook her head. "But I don't actually believe Rand Bole intends for us to live in squalor, Matthew. I give the devil his due. He isn't niggardly. He's lavish enough with Petty, isn't he? But of course the leak isn't in Petty's room, and he leaves us to Petty."

Cheerful again and sweetly courageous against overwhelming odds, she opened the *Era*, observing, "We're quite newsy this morning, and I'm afraid tongues will be wagging about Petty again. Dear me, how times change! My mother always said that a lady is news only twice in her life—when she's born and when she dies."

Celestia was circuitous then with the *Era*. She read the editorials aloud first while the water splashed in the pan. The colonel had divided his space this morning between Mr. Rockefeller and Mrs. Rand Bole. A little bird had told ye editor that Mr. Rockefeller had said the field would come to his terms or he would make grass grow in the streets.

"Ye editor would remind Mr. Rockefeller"—Celestia read the colonel's thunder in plaintive bleat—"that the Seaboard pipeline has, as of this date, reached Holmstead, where pumps are being installed."

And ye editor had been among those present yesterday when the cornerstone of the new hospital was laid. As Mrs. Rand Bole wielded the trowel, the sun had come through a rift in the clouds to shine down upon her, a happy augur for the community's growing interest in the stricken.

"For the man doesn't breathe in our fair valley," Celestia read, "with soul so shriveled that, remembering how this frail flower of pure womanhood stayed our hand through the Valley of the Shadow, he could think in terms of self."

Celestia's mouth tightened into a buttonhole. Sniffing, she said, "A chambermaid from the Bannon House, mind you! Cordelia Jones couldn't tell *me* there was a logger in these hills didn't have his way with her, but money talks, Matthew."

She turned, sighing, to the levee and the guest list. She said, "Petty needn't have rushed off, after all. Still, she wouldn't

know which way the cat was going to jump with Cordelia Jones, would she?"

She came then to the ecstatic moment. She said, "Has somebody got around Flora Grey, I wonder? Or is she as stupid as ever?" Clearing her throat, she read the first item under "Chit-chat," savoring each word.

"Mrs. James Preston has left us again for New York," she read. "'Are we to see more *recherché* toilettes, Mrs. Preston?'"

She let it hang in the air between them while she glanced anxiously up at the blister in the ceiling. Sighing again, she turned to the second item.

"Mr. Rand Bole is in New York," she read. "'On business, no doubt.'"

Her eyes meeting Matthew's over the top of the paper were sympathetic. Great drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. They merged to trickle down the dead-white parchment of his skin into his beard. His jaws were clenched, and his eyes, live coals in their sunken hollows, struck at her. Celestia shivered even as the warm glow spread through her. Matthew reminded her of a rattlesnake she had seen on the Creek. One of those Creek curs had mangled it until it couldn't coil to strike, but it struck with its eyes, its fangs still darting as she poked at it with a stick. But it was only in Matthew's eyes too. Matthew couldn't hurt her. He would never walk or talk again except in her dreams, when now and again she had a bad night.

"Let's not worry about Flora Grey, Matthew." Celestia was consoling. "Rand Bole's wife will do something about it. She won't break with him. Oh no! She knows on which side her bread is buttered. Oil may not be worth much right now, but if the Seaboard Pipeline goes through, it will be."

Thinking, Celestia smoothed the *Era* on her knees. Slowly her eyes turned cunning. The light of inspiration was in them as she looked at Matthew.

"I just this minute thought of something, Matthew!" Celestia's bosom rose and fell. "Why don't I write Rand Bole's wife a letter, anxious as she is to keep wagging tongues quiet? I could suggest that in view of the close connection—the very

close connection!—between our two families, she might like to help us.”

She looked at Matthew and caught her breath with a little sucking sound. His head rolled from side to side, and it seemed as if his will might galvanize his flooded brain to action; as if he might rise from his bed to loom over her. She caught her breath with the sucking sound, shrinking into her chair. No . . . *No!* Then she let her breath out slowly. Matthew’s head lolled to one side and his eyes glazed over. Almost faint with relief, Celestia smoothed the *Era* in deep thought, and then caution overtook her.

“I could wait to see what happens,” she decided. “Dear me, we never know which way the cat will jump these days, do we?” Celestia sighed, thinking. “But I could wait—to see—how anxious—she is.”

Genuinely preoccupied, she shuffled toward the door. She was about to close it behind her when the cockatoo croaked. Celestia glanced back and knew victory. Matthew had thrust his tongue out.

And she hadn’t long to wait to see what happened. The next day Miss Flora had another item under “Chitchat.”

“Mrs. Rand Bole left last night for New York,” Miss Flora wrote, “to join Mr. Bole and her friend, Mrs. James Preston. Mrs. Bole hopes that Mr. Bole and Mrs. Preston will share her desire to see Lillian Russell at Tony Pastor’s and to hear Millie Cavendish sing ‘You Naughty, Naughty Men.’ It sounds very gay, Mrs. Bole!”

Having read it aloud to Matthew, Celestia sat hunched in the slipper chair, her lip caught between her teeth. She read it aloud again, weighing each word.

“It sounds very anxious to me, Matthew,” she decided. “Yes, it sounds—very—anxious—indeed.”

IN THE SPLENDID LOBBY OF THE HOFFMAN HOUSE on Broadway, Mr. Travis, the manager, ran head on into Mr. Rand Bole—oil! And a fine figure of a man, Mr. Bole; fine indeed. Mr. Travis bowed, beaming.

“Ah, Mr. Bole!” Mr. Travis beamed. “We are honored to have you with us again.”

“You are, Travis?” Mr. Bole considered him, his eyes bland. “Well, if you’re honored, I’m honored. But you can do without me for a time, I trust?”

“It will be difficult, Mr. Bole.” Mr. Travis bowed again, his eyes bland. “So you are leaving us for a while? Ah, well, when the devil drives, needs must!”

He had taken only a few steps beyond Mr. Bole when, thinking, he stopped and turned.

“Oh, Mr. Bole!” he called. “If Mr. Archbold should call again in your absence?”

“Archbold?” Stopping, Mr. Bole considered Mr. Archbold, too, his eyes still bland. “Why, just tell Archbold, if you will, Travis, that if I want to get in touch with him I know where to find him—and that’s under Rockefeller’s wing.”

“At your service, Mr. Bole!” Mr. Travis bowed again.

But in his office behind the desk in the center of the lobby, Mr. Travis thought the matter over with care. How would John Archbold invariably know of Mr. Bole’s arrival in town? Certainly, to judge from Mr. Bole’s message to him, Mr. Bole wasn’t at pains to announce his advent to Mr. Archbold, yet almost invariably Mr. Archbold called to inquire for Mr. Bole within a short time of his arrival.

"Tell Mr. Bole that I called, if you will, Travis," Mr. Archbold said, "and that I'd like to get in touch with him. He'll know where to find me."

But to deliver Mr. Bole's message in return? To John Archbold? Mr. Travis fitted the facts of the picture carefully together in his mind. There would be no love lost between Mr. Bole as an oil producer and Mr. Archbold as an associate of Mr. Rockefeller. No indeed! And under Rockefeller's wing, to judge from the clamor against Mr. Rockefeller in the newspapers, John Archbold was on the windward side. Still, Mr. Travis was inclined to throw in, himself, with William Vanderbilt. Testifying about Mr. Rockefeller and his associates before a Senate committee, and speaking from experience, Mr. Vanderbilt had said, "These men are shrewd. I don't believe by any legislative enactment or anything else, through any of the states or all of the states, you can keep such men down. You can't do it. They will be on top all the time. You see if they aren't!" Deliver any such message as Mr. Bole's? To John Archbold? Well—no! Mr. Travis would say, "You and Mr. Bole seem to be like ships in the night, Mr. Archbold. And to your mutual misfortune, I'm sure!"

Mr. Travis had just come to his decision when the door of his office opened, and a flustered desk clerk shut the door carefully behind him.

"Mrs. Rand Bole has arrived, sir, to join Mr. Bole!" The clerk whispered it.

"Mrs. Bole?" It was only a split second before Mr. Travis said calmly, "Ask Mrs. Bole to do me the honor of stepping into my office."

Mrs. Rand Bole? Hmrrrrrr! Mr. Travis was not nonplused. For a man of his weight he had in his time and office skated over an amazing mileage of thin ice, and with impunity. But he was thinking busily as he seated Mrs. Bole in the privacy of his own office with all the bustling deference due the lady's station as the wife of a regular and valued guest of the house. A pumpkin-shaped man in cutaway, gray-striped trousers, knife-creased, and gray gaiters, with a camellia in his

lapel, Mr. Travis was a walking advertisement for the celebrated cuisine of the house. The tails of his cutaway bobbed as he bustled; his bright silk waistcoat strained at its buttons; the gaiters formed a continuous gray streak around Mrs. Bole; and, having settled her into a chair, he sank down into his swivel chair behind his desk, slightly breathless and pink, but with a benign smile.

Nonplused? By no means. As he had bustled, and now as he regarded Mrs. Bole with a smile, Mr. Travis was mentally assembling the facts of the matter, fitting them into a picture. He would examine the picture with cautious attention to the most minute detail and, having examined it, he would draw his careful conclusion, acting upon the conclusion with utmost discretion and every appearance of casualness. Mr. Travis was invariably, soothingly, imperturbably affable, but this enduring affability was lined with experience as his smile was lined with a penetrating insight, spawn of that experience. Mr. Travis, always informed, could measure his man; and, having measured his man, he chose his course with the lady in the case.

First, Mr. Bole—a fine figure of a man!—was registered at the Hoffman House. Mrs. Bole knew this. The clerk at the desk, who had passed her along to Mr. Travis as if she were a hot dish, had so informed her. Yes, Mr. Bole had his usual suite overlooking Madison Square and the broad plaza where busy Broadway and exclusive Fifth Avenue met. But Mr. Bole was not in at the moment. He was seldom, if ever, in at the moment. The fact was that the Hoffman House was to Mr. Bole only a *pied-à-terre* from which he departed on business—or pleasure?—excursions of indefinite duration. Considering precedent, Mr. Travis could have no idea whatever when Mr. Bole would be in. It could be today, tomorrow, a week from tomorrow.

Second, Mr. Bole left no forwarding address for mail or telegrams, no slightest hint of his destination. He left no message for possible callers, with the possible exception of his message for John Archbold. Mrs. Rand Bole? Hmmmmmm!

Most decidedly, in Mrs. Bole, Mr. Travis was dealing with a personage! No effort on the lady's part was necessary to convince him of that fact, and she made none. A slight figure in mink-edged cloak and bonnet, the toes of her small shoes of French kid barely peeping from under flutings of rich Antwerp silk, Mrs. Bole was no more than receptive. The quiet, profound type! And no doubt wearied from her journey. She was pale. There were evidences of strain behind the nose veil, but her daintily gloved hands were relaxed on the arms of her chair. And there was the fact that, although Mr. Bole was a frequent guest of the house, Mr. Travis had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Bole for the first time today. He leaned forward in his chair, still smiling, and on the *qui vive* to be at her service.

"Ah, yes, Mrs. Bole! And your arrival is a little surprise for Mr. Bole?" Mr. Travis washed his hands with the happy air of a fellow conspirator.

"A surprise, yes." Mrs. Bole returned his smile.

"I assumed as much, because Mr. Bole hadn't led us to anticipate the pleasure and—"

"It's annoying, I know." Mrs. Bole was contrite. "But I'm subject to these sudden decisions."

"A lady's privilege, madam!" Mr. Travis found the little feminine foible only charming as his mind turned to Mr. Bole. Business—or pleasure? If it were John Archbold, now, the answer would be *business*. But Mr. Bole? Business or pleasure . . . The answer was, "Either!" In which case, Mr. Travis could assume that Mr. Bole would be most pleasantly surprised and regret only that the denouement was subject to delay since Mr. Bole wasn't in at the moment.

"And if we were to get in touch with him there would be no surprise!" Mr. Travis found it a major dilemma, but he retained his aplomb as Mrs. Bole considered whether or not to forego the surprise.

"I think I'd rather wait," she decided.

And Mr. Travis was in instant sympathy with her decision.

Instant and complete! There was but one contingency. In Mr. Bole's absence, he had no authority to admit anyone to Mr. Bole's suite. To admit even his wife without his authority would be out of the question. A ridiculous precaution on the face of it, but—

"But quite understandable!" Mrs. Bole said quickly.

With growing enthusiasm for the little plot then, Mr. Travis decided that the contingency was, after all, fortunate. As it happened, the suite adjoining Mr. Bole's was unoccupied. The two parlors were connected by sliding doors, so that the suites could be thrown together for sizable families or for private parties. It would be Mr. Travis's pleasure to see that Mrs. Bole was made comfortable in the unoccupied suite pending Mr. Bole's return. And when Mr. Bole returned she would have only to tap on the connecting doors and to speak, and the little surprise would be *fait accompli*! Mr. Travis washed his hands, contemplating it.

"You are so very helpful, Mr. Travis!" Mrs. Bole was grateful.

Grateful, dear madam? But why? Mr. Travis was there to be of service in such matters, and to receive Mrs. Bole could be only the privilege of the manager himself! Upon Mr. Bole's return it would be nothing at all to move her into Mr. Bole's suite. . . .

"Oh, but I couldn't think of it!" Rising, Mrs. Bole was determined to be as little trouble as possible. "If you will just find room for me now, and—and we are used to space."

Ah, no doubt—no doubt. And Mrs. Bole's preferences were paramount. Mr. Travis's tails bobbed as in person he conducted Mrs. Bole across the broad high lobby, with its walls and ceilings decorated in gold and copper and silver and its tall columns wreathed with shining brass chandeliers. The boy followed with Mrs. Bole's luggage—surprisingly meager for a lady on holiday in New York! The little procession halted at the elevator and, avoiding any pause during which Mrs. Bole might ask where she could get in touch with her husband, if she should change her mind, Mr. Travis inquired about Bradford,

a most—ah—unusual place, from all accounts. Wasn't there something about a pipeline? Oh, to be sure! Mr. Travis had read of it in the papers, but the details had faded from his mind. And hadn't he read that Dom Pedro de Alcantara was including the oil field in his tour? Ah, yes, he remembered now.

Mr. Travis cleared his throat. Sudden as Mrs. Bole's decision to visit New York had been, he felt, himself, that it was well timed. To be sure, the park, visible from the windows of Mrs. Bole's suite, wasn't as charming as it would be sometime hence, with its shade trees and beds of flowers—ah, the water lilies!—but the rigors of winter were over, and the Season was still in full swing. There was Edward Harrigan as Old Lavender. James O'Neill was at the Booth Theatre in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Millie Cavendish was—ah—quite sparkling in *The Black Crook*. And of course there was the rising new star, Lillian Russell, in *Pinafore* at Tony Pastor's.

"A ravishing creature!" Mr. Travis's eyes glowed with a warm memory. "Ravishing!"

The elevator came, and Mr. Travis bowed Mrs. Bole into it. It ascended slowly, and then Mr. Travis began to bustle in earnest. He saw personally to the basket of fruit and the flowers to go to Mrs. Bole's suite with his compliments. He saw to the matter of a maid to unpack for Mrs. Bole and to assist her with her toilettes. He conferred with the headwaiter in the ladies' dining room about which table Mrs. Bole was apt to prefer unless, as a lady alone, she preferred to dine in her suite. And he left instructions at the desk that, no matter what hour of the day or evening Mr. Bole returned, he himself was to be summoned, since it was his experience that most gentlemen appreciated a forewarning in little surprises of this kind. Beyond these details Mr. Travis had to let the matter rest.

But, alas, Mr. Bole didn't return that day or the next. Mrs. Bole dined in her suite. She took the air briefly in the park, walking among the fountains and statues and the prettily dressed children with their nurses. She assured Mr. Travis that she was indeed comfortable, that she required nothing further,

and that she was truly grateful for the quiet interval, fatigued as she was from her journey.

"I can imagine Mr. Bole's concern, if he knew!" Mr. Travis said.

"Yes, so can I." Mrs. Bole smiled, and he could only shake his head, baffled.

He was returning to his office from lunch in the gentlemen's café the next day, a fresh camellia in his lapel, when he ran head on into John Archbold hurrying through the Broadway lobby, and Mr. Archbold, pale and boyish, with the look of a shy, quiet student, was the same dynamo of energy and confident good nature! Buoyant and imperturbable as Mr. Travis himself, he laid a hand on Mr. Travis's plump shoulder.

"Good morning, Travis! By George, you're just the man I want to see!"

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Archbold! A fine day, isn't it? Yes indeed, a fine day. A touch of spring in the air, wouldn't you say?"

"Is Rand Bole in?" Mr. Archbold ignored the weather.

"Mr. Bole?" Mr. Travis thought busily. "Shall we inquire at the desk?" Bowing, he led the way, and with John Archbold at his elbow, he fixed a clerk with a bland eye as he said, "Mr. Bole has already left, hasn't he? Ah, yes, I thought so! You and Mr. Bole seem to be ships that pass in the night, Mr. Archbold, and to your mutual misfortune, I'm sure! Would you—ah—care to leave a message?"

"I've left more than one message," Mr. Archbold reminded. "Were they delivered?"

Mr. Travis winced inwardly at the thought of desecrating the faultless service that was his pride. Still, the very desecration was an integral part of that service.

"It wouldn't seem so, would it?" Mr. Travis frowned, troubled. "But I can assure you I'll get to the bottom of it, and——"

"Oh, don't bother!" Still good-natured, Mr. Archbold took a wallet from his hip pocket. From the wallet he extracted two

cards, a business card and a personal card. For a minute he stood there, deciding between them. Finally, almost hesitant—for John Archbold!—he decided upon the business card and, handing it to Mr. Travis, he said, “Just have my card sent up to Mrs. Bole if you will, Travis.”

THE BUSINESS CARD HAD BEEN A STRATEGIC ERROR.

He realized it when, in the parlor of her suite, Molly made him a sweeping curtsy, a forefinger beneath her chin and a fold of her skirt in her hand. He found himself standing there with his hat in his hand and his tongue in his cheek.

"How do you do, Mr. John Archbold, vice-president of Standard Oil!" There was awe in her voice, and her eyes laughed up at him. She waved him toward a tufted high-backed chair by a window. "Do take the throne chair, won't you?"

"Well—since Mr. Rockefeller isn't here!" He laid his hat on the marble-topped console and took the throne chair with equanimity, folding his arms across his chest with an air of majesty as he looked at Molly. She sat opposite him on a frail gilt chair, her skirts spread out around her. Her hands were clasped on her knees; her eyes were fixed on his face with a mixture of awe and apprehension in them. He frowned.

"I've a notion to put the price of oil down," he said.

"But oil *is* down, Mr. Vice-President!" Then quickly thinking better of her temerity, she said, solicitous, "And how is Mr. Rockefeller—with the saintly eyes?"

"Oh, very well." He was reassuring. "Very well indeed. And fortunately!"

"It *is* fortunate for you, John." Molly was unselfishly relieved. "Isn't it? Why, what *would* you do without him?"

He thought it over, and then he decided, "I'd grab my hat and leave now. But what would *you* do without him, Molly?"

"I?" Her eyes flew wide. "But I have a husband, John! And I feel quite sure he'd build a pipeline to the coast—with or without Mr. Rockefeller."

"Yes, I believe he would, my dear lady."

"And where is Mr. Dodd?" Molly inquired.

"Mr. Dodd?" The corners of his mouth twitched. "God knows!"

"Such an eloquent orator!" Molly sighed. "And so very adaptable! Dear me, it *must* be hard to keep track of him!"

Chuckling, John Archbold let his eyes come to rest on her hands clasped on her knees. A lace ruffle edging the sleeves at her wrists fell softly over them. He was not the man to be taken in by the lace; by the lace or the sweetness of spirit. Underlying them were vigor and insight, a facile wit. Dangerous shoals for her adversary, all of them. Thinking, he looked through the window and across the plaza, where horsecars, cabs and hansoms, buses and drays crossed paths. Across the plaza in the park, the trees were brown skeletons above the still fountains and the statues.

"Isn't there a matinee today?" he said. "I thought you and Petty might be going to hear Millie Cavendish sing 'You Naughty, Naughty Men.'" His glance came gravely back to her as he said, "Or has Miss Flora Grey misled me?"

Molly threw up her hands in a little gesture of despair, languishing before his eyes. Miss Flora hadn't misled him, but alas! She had no sooner arrived than she had suffered an attack of her old malaise.

"And the night air is out of the question," she sighed, "so Rand is beauing Petty."

John Archbold played with the fob pendant from the heavy gold chain across his waistcoat as he said, "We caught a glimpse of them last night, Anne and I, at Delmonico's and afterward at Tony Pastor's."

"And am I ever to hear the last of Lillian Russell?" Molly rolled her eyes. They filled with the glow of warm memory. She lowered her voice to masculine register. "'A ravishing creature! Ravishing!'"

John Archbold smiled, and with admiration in his eyes. Settling back in his chair, he crossed his knees as, thinking again, he looked around the parlor. The Brussels carpet was elabo-

rately scrolled. There were other fragile chairs, gilt and papier-mâché painted with birds and flowers in gold, each with its back against the wall in an air of splendid aloofness. There was a long mirror in a gilded frame, with the carved marble-topped console under it, and a standing lamp. The lamp shade was of black lace with a streamer of pale green ribbon dangling from the top, finished with a ball ornament. His glance rested briefly on the sliding doors beyond Molly.

"So oil is down," he mused. "But you're quite lavish here, aren't you?"

"Oh, but we expect oil to go up soon, John!"

"Of course, what would be lavish to us poor refiners," he mused on, "would be only comfortable to you producers."

"Dear John!" There was admiring wonder in Molly's voice. "How quickly you learned from Mr. Rockefeller, didn't you?"

"I *will* get into these things!" He shook his head.

"You do seem to, don't you?" Molly was warmly sympathetic. "And once you were on our side, weren't you?"

"That was before I learned from Mr. Rockefeller that I couldn't refine oil as cheaply as he could, Molly. Or as well. And that I'd have to go with him—or go under."

"You learned, too, that you couldn't ship by railroad as cheaply as he could, didn't you?" Molly was still sympathetic.

"Yes, but only because I didn't ship as much."

"Oh well!" Molly sighed for him. "Mr. Rockefeller has met his match at last, hasn't he?"

"His match?" John Archbold was dubious. "*Rockefeller?*"

"But you know my husband, John!" Molly tossed her head.

"Rand?" Weighing it, John Archbold sat forward in his chair, his eyes direct. "Can I take your word for it, Molly? Remember, I took the price of my refinery in Standard Oil stock."

She looked quickly down to her clasped hands. For a long minute she sat like that, looking down, and he sat forward in his chair, but when she looked up there was only the mischief in her eyes.

"Of course, Mr. Rockefeller doesn't think the pipeline will

work," she eluded him, "and you always agree with him, don't you?"

He sat back in his chair, matching the finger tips of one hand to the finger tips of his other hand.

"Not always," he said. "Sometimes I disagree with him."

"Out loud?" Molly shuddered for him.

"Out loud?" He considered it, deciding, "Well—no."

"How difficult it must be for you, John!" Molly pondered a way out for him. "But someday you can come with us—again." A sudden thought struck her, and comprehension dawned in her eyes. She said, "Was—was that the purpose of the business card?"

"To ask you for a job?" He smiled. "No, not quite yet."

She looked at him, obviously puzzled, until he said, "Molly, you know well enough that the purpose of the business card was to warn you that we intend to buy oil properties and the controlling stock in the Seaboard Pipeline."

For a long minute she sat there looking at him, and only whitening knuckles revealed that her clasped hands had tightened. Then she said quietly, "Yes, I knew quite well, John. Is that all?"

"You know it's not all, don't you?" he said, and it was Molly who came out with it coolly. She said, "Whose oil property do you intend to buy, John?"

"Taylor's and Satterfield's and Coon Frisbee's—among others."

"And Lennon Oil?" Molly said.

"And Lennon Oil, dear lady!" He said it quickly and firmly, and Molly smiled.

"You haven't bought them yet, have you?" she inquired.

"Not yet!" He sat forward again in his chair. "But I think we will someday. Don't you?"

The smile wavered, and her eyes dropped again to her hands. He looked out across the park lest she look up and see the pity for her in his eyes.

"I—don't—know," she said finally, and for a minute there was only the sound of rumbling wheels from outside, the clang-

ing bells of horsecars. He got up to pace the floor and then, wheeling, he faced her.

"Molly," he said, "we won't be caught napping again. We intend to control oil from the ground to the consumer."

She looked up. Their eyes met and held.

"So do we!" she said. "You didn't take the chance, John, *and you didn't find the oil.*"

"They're gamblers, I tell you!" He found himself shouting. "Control oil? *They can't control themselves.*" Pacing, he rammed a clenched fist into his other palm. "It's waste. Waste and chaos. I tell you there's got to be a Rockefeller."

"And how much oil would a Rockefeller have found, John?"

"All right, they found it!" His jaw line hardened. "And they had their chance. They had us in a pocket, but how many times have they pledged not to drill until we paid their price? They could have made us pay through the nose, but did they? No! They've got to see what's at the bottom of another hole, and another and another, until oil is a glut on the market. Then they damn Rockefeller."

"And build a pipeline!" Molly's chin went up.

"And build a pipeline!" He was shouting again, and he stopped, swallowing. Standing there, facing her, he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and got a grip on himself. "Molly, I'll tell you something. Their pipeline will work. I know this man, Hermann Hauck! And the day it works they'll have us in a pocket, but will they stand together? They never have. They know each other because they know themselves."

"They can stand by." Her chin was still up. "I know it. I've seen it."

"Molly!" He was patient. "They've cut their own throats time after time. What would make them stand by now?"

"*The right man!*" Her chin was high even as it trembled. He saw the hope still flaming in her eyes. The right man? And—in God's name!—*she meant Rand Bole.*

"You could be right, dear lady!" He said it easily, smiling. "And it wouldn't be the first time I've been wrong."

Bowing, he took his hat from the console. Molly walked to

the door with him, but there was only the soft rustle of silk across the carpet. Twilight had crept over the room. Above the bare brown branches of the trees in the park the sun had set. At the door John Archbold stopped and, one hand on the doorknob, stood looking down at Molly. Even in the dimming light he saw the signs of strain. She was tired. Tired and alone. His eyes flicked the sliding doors and came back to her.

"Molly," he said, "I'm asking you—and for the last time!—to set your price on Lennon Oil."

Smiling, she held out her hand, and it was steady in his.

"John," she said, "you've made me that offer for the last time—with impunity."

CURLING HER HAIR WITH THE HOT IRON, PETTY SANG in her bedroom down the hall. The cur dog, stretched full length before the basket of glowing coals in the drawing-room fireplace, stirred uneasily, one eye on Rand.

*"Kathleen Mavourneen! the grey dawn is breaking,
The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill;
The lark from her light wing the bright dew is shaking.
Kathleen Mavourneen! what, slumb'ring still!"*

Petty's high childish treble floated through the horseshoe arch that led to the dining room to Rand as he lay on the cerise velvet sofa, his hands locked behind his head. Hysteria? Rand yawned. She had used that fuddy-duddy doctor for her cat's paw. She was gleeful enough last night at Delmonico's, wasn't she, and at the theater afterward? Hysteria!

Hysteria? Another of her damned tantrums! She'd try it on him when he left tonight, but he'd bring her out of it without sedatives and a nurse! A cold little smile played around his mouth as his eyes traveled around the room.

It was in the new Japanese manner. Around the walls was a dado of Japanese matting, capped with a gold-and-ivory molding. Above the molding was wallpaper with chrysanthemums overlaid with silver lacquer on a background of gold and colored lacquer, and the ceiling and cornices were lacquered in gold and ivory. Rand's eyes came to focus upon the mantelpiece that reached from floor to ceiling.

It was Japanese, with tiers of shelves above the lofty looking-glass. He counted the shelves and niches—forty. His eyes

ran over the bric-a-brac displayed on them. There were Sèvres and Minton vases, colored plates, Wedgwood bowls. There was a majolica vase filled with silver grasses, a bisquit-ware vase filled with peacock feathers. A blue glass bowl held gilded wood shavings. From a Bohemian glass vase protruded paper spills for lighting the fire. There was a cast-iron statuette of Clytie, rising full-bosomed from a nest of sunflower petals, beside a statuette of the Dying Gladiator. Stuck here and there behind a vase was a round Japanese fan with a wooden stick. Like a squirrel that had run onto a windfall of nuts, Petty scampered back and forth from Tiffany's and Gorham's and her nest, one bright bauble or another clutched close.

Turning from the fireplace, his eyes took inventory. The room must be fifty feet long, but he'd defy any man alive to cross it without barking his shins every six inches against a chair, a tabouret, or a bulbous-legged table. There were Eastlake Cromwell chairs, heavy Tudor chairs, Italian Renaissance chairs with carved backs, overstuffed chairs covered in satin, in tapestry, in plush. At the head of the cerise velvet sofa with its swags of fringe was a Marie Antoinette chair next to a tall jardiniere of gilded bamboo. The jardiniere's top and low shelf were covered in plush from which hung fringes of silk net trimmed with tassels. From a silver urn exquisitely wrought in *repoussé* work sprouted an *Aspidistra* plant.

"Oh, hast thou forgotten how soon we must sever?

Oh, hast thou forgotten this day we must part?

It may be for years, and it may be forever;

Oh, why art thou silent, thou voice of my heart?"

Petty's voice floated through the arch, beyond which a great silver-and-gilt epergne on the dining table caught the light of the crystal luster, and the dog turned uneasy again, one eye on Rand. Rand's face softened. Of all the stray curs that had attached themselves to him, this was the choice specimen! The dog was wolfing refuse in the gutter when he got out of the cab. The dog had looked up, dropped his carrion

tidbit as if it were red hot, to follow, sniffing, at his heels, a dun-colored, lop-eared rack of bones, mange-ridden and pungent. The doorman, resplendent in gold braid, opened the door, and the dog shot through it ahead of Rand. The doorman's color turned choleric. His eyes turned glassy.

"Is that— This isn't your dog, sir!"

"That's my dog!" Rand said it with delight. "How do you like him?"

"But I can't permit—" He looked up from the dog and swallowed, choking. "A very—ah—intelligent look about him, sir."

Under the doorman's glazed eyes the dog had shot ahead of Rand into the elevator. The operator's jaw dropped. He looked from Rand to the doorman, and the doorman shifted from one polished boot to the other.

"Suite 3!" Rand said blithely.

The dog was at his heels as he inserted his key in the lock of the door of Suite 3. He threw the door open, the dog shot through it, and the starched maid dropped her dustcloth, screaming. The scream brought Petty from her bedroom, the hot curling iron in her hand, her gabrielle clutched around her. Petty stamped her foot, outraged.

"Rand, I will *not* have the filthy beast here!"

"You won't?" Rand tossed his hat toward the sniffing maid.

"The hell you won't, milady!"

And there the dog lay before the fire, gluttoned with food until his sides bulged, as Petty sang in her high childish treble. The singing stopped, and then Rand heard two women shrilling at each other. The dog huddled on the hearthrug, trembling. Always this damned yammering with the maids! Now there was a nurse. He heard the rustle of the bamboo draperies in the arch, caught the scent of violets, and shut his eyes, feigning sleep.

Petty came to sit beside him on the sofa. He kept his eyes shut, breathing deep. She ran her fingers playfully through his hair, and he turned his head irritably as if in sleep. Something tickled his chin then, and he scowled, his eyes still shut.

It tickled his nose and, sneezing, he opened his eyes. It was a peacock feather in Petty's hand, and her eyes laughed down at him, blue as the sea in the sun.

She was in negligee. Her wrapper of French grenadine was blue and cut low to reveal the high white swell of her breasts. It fell away to a ruffled train, revealing the lacy, ribbon-knotted froth of her petticoat. Her hair, caught high, fell in a sunny cascade of curls, fresh from the iron. Yawning, Rand took the peacock feather from her and, snapping it in two, hurled it toward the fire. He said, "What was that damned yowling about?"

"It was the laundress." Petty's lower lip protruded. "She scorched one of my chemises, and she—she was insolent."

"Insolent? Fire her!"

Petty's lower lip trembled. She looked at the dog licking one of his myriad sores and shivered. She said, "They're all insolent, and they—they whisper behind my back."

Rand yawned as two bright tears trembled on her lashes. There should be a telegram from Moffat at the hotel telling him the pipeline had crossed under the railroad trestle. And then Petty hurled herself upon him, sobbing. She pressed her wet cheek against his, her arms around his neck.

"Rand, take me away," she sobbed. "Take me to Paris—take me to Vienna. Take me away from here."

He held her within the circle of his arm beside him on the sofa. She pressed her soft body against his, raining kisses along his lean cheek, and her arms tightened around his neck.

"Take me away before I die, Rand—take me away."

"Go home to your father for a while, why don't you?" Rand yawned, and he felt the shiver run through her soft body.

"He follows me with his eyes." She shivered again and tightened her arms. "And Auntie says things, and they whisper, all of them. Oh, Rand, take me away from them. Take me to Paris. Take me to Vienna. Take me——"

"All right, all right!" His eyes went opaque. "I'll take you, Petty."

Petty's sobs suddenly dwindled to little catches of breath.

She lay beside him, still and taut, like a child before whose eyes the toy for which it has screamed is dangled.

"There—there's Music Mountain."

"Music Mountain is the legal property of Mrs. Rand Bole."

"But we wouldn't have any money, Rand!"

"Not much." There was a gleam in his eye. "But we'd have each other."

Then Petty was sobbing again, her face buried in his shoulder.

"And I prayed for her to be taken, Rand," she sobbed, "so you could be free, but everybody died with smallpox, and she lived. She lived, and Auntie lived and Papa, and I prayed to God every night."

He felt a prickle at the roots of his hair. His arm under her went lax. Her arms tightened around his neck. Her lips were against his ear, and in his nostrils was the scent of violets. Violets. . . Christ!

"Rand, don't leave me," she whispered. "Don't leave me alone. Don't go. Rand, what's the matter with—with us? Tell me, Rand. Only tell me."

It was his chance; his chance to say, "I'm through. I've been through, and damned well you know it." Petty held his arm around her, drawing it tight, and he heard himself say, "I've had something else on my mind."

"But you'll stay tonight?" She caught the lobe of his ear between her small white teeth, nibbling.

He sat up on the sofa, smoothing his hair. Petty caught at his hand. She pillowed her cheek in it as she lay there.

"Tonight, Rand?" Her eyes drooped. "Just tonight?"

"For God's sake, let go of me, will you?"

He left her sobbing there on the velvet sofa. The bamboo draperies rustled as he strode through the arch. He turned into the hall, and from the hall into the bedroom, stopping dead in the doorway. The ceiling was painted in hearts and darts. The walls were hung in rose silk. The windows were hung in pale rose satin with an under drapery of rose taffeta appliquéd with white Venetian lace. The beds were reproductions of the Marie

Antoinette beds in the Petit Trianon. There was a painted and gilt dressing table with a mosaic top, a washstand with gilt arabesques, and a marble basin inlaid with silver fish. *And a whore's nest, if ever he saw one!*

On the washstand lay the curling iron and a silver-backed hairbrush with blond tendrils clinging to it. On the dressing table Petty had upset a satin box of Maillard chocolates, and scattered through the litter of crystal bottles were frozen violets and morsels of marrons glacés, bonbons she had nibbled and discarded. The cover of the box was on the floor. On it was painted a spray of violets tied with a silver ribbon. Rand kicked the cover under the dressing table. Wilted violets drooped from a bowl on a tabouret. Filling the chairs was a welter of stockings, gloves, lacy furbelows. And over all was the violet scent Petty sprinkled on the sheets and towels, of the heart-shaped sachets she tucked in the drawers. Violets . . . Christ!

He threw a window wide. He hurled the wilted violets through it, and the dank water in the bowl after them. His hands on the window sill, he leaned out, breathing deep. A dense fog hung low. In it, lampposts were blurred out, leaving yellow, furry balls of light suspended in mid-air. Buildings were ghostly façades, and the detached lights of cabs and hansoms and carriages crept at a snail's pace as drivers and horses felt their way. There was the sound of ironshod hoofs on pavement; of condensed moisture dripping from eaves and sills, the bare branches of trees; the smell of wet wood and ashes and rotting leaves.

Revulsion swept through him so strong that it gripped his vitals, the loneliness and longing deep and sharp enough to cut the heart out of his breast. Through his head swept visions of a deal table scrubbed white; of gleaming copper kettles hanging from spikes in the wall, reflecting the firelight. He smelled apples and fresh cider, wind-whipped cotton flannel sheets, heard the bubble of a kettle boiling on the crane over the fire. He heard a voice singing, full and sweet, "‘Why should I doubt Thy grace?’"

"Ma!" It was his own voice he heard. "Ma!"

But he saw Ma rocking, empty-eyed. Her voice quavering, she sang, "'Oh, her name is Sal, and she's your gal.'" He saw her laid out in the dark red merino dress, a shrunken figure on the bed in the lean-to. He saw the pine box on the bed of his wagon under the tarpaulin behind the hairless, broken team. His jaw line hardened. They had got Ma, but they hadn't got him. He had 'em all where the hair was short with the line to the coast. No man alive would hold the whip hand over Rand Bole!

Turning from the window, he shrugged out of the quilted dressing gown and hung it neatly in the wardrobe. Donning his vest and his coat, he took his topcoat from its hanger and the felt Homburg from the shelf. In the drawing room Petty looked into the mirror of the mantelpiece. She touched one forefinger to her tongue and, dampening a blond ringlet, twisted it into a tighter curl. And there was that damned dog!

"What in hell can I do with him?" he thought out loud, and Petty said, "You're not going to leave him here!"

"I'm not?" Rand looked her over.

Petty's eyes dropped to the dog, their lids half closed. Her lips drew back over her teeth in a little smile. She said, "All right, leave him to me." And the dog, trembling, crawled to Rand on his belly. He cowered at Rand's feet and licked his boots. Rand bent down to scratch him behind an ear.

"He had nobody to take care of him, Petty." His voice was gentle. "He was hungry and cold and in the gutter."

Petty's eyes widened in terror. She came to him, cringing like the dog, and clung to him, sobbing. Suddenly her body went rigid. Her eyes darted to the corners of the room.

"They're whispering! Shhhhhh! You hear them? I wake in the night, and they're whispering about me. I scream for Papa, and he isn't there. Nobody's there, Rand, *nobody*." Her voice rose in shrill terror. "Papa . . . *Papa!*"

Good God! He held her close, and she fought him off, screaming. His hand went over her mouth, and she sank her teeth into it. He swung her up in his arms and carried her,

screaming, into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. He held her close to him on the bed, one hand over her mouth. Above his hand her face contorted, and the cords stood out in her white throat that swelled with the scream he held back. Sweat trickled down the side of his face, and he knew relief when a tap on the door announced the grim-eyed, tight-lipped nurse with the sedative.

"Good God!" Wiping the trickle of sweat with his handkerchief, he looked at the nurse. "She'll kill herself this way."

"Kill herself?" The nurse shrugged. "Herself? Oh no!"

He left Petty asleep, her hair spread out on the satin pillow like a golden halo, the long lashes sweeping her cheek. In the cab he sat with his chin on his chest, his coat collar turned up and his hat pulled down over his eyes. The fog had thickened, closing in. Cabs and hansoms, their lights only furry blurs, passed him like ships in the night. The loneliness was upon him again, and the longing that cut through his heart. His hand groped for the dog curled up on the seat beside him.

One of him, open-eyed and deliberate, had taken Petty as a trophy of his triumph, thinking to discard her when he had no further use for her as she had discarded him. But to the other one of him, that young buck from the Creek, she had still been the angel pictured on the card given him for perfect attendance at Sunday school in the Seceders' Church. One of him would always pay her off in her own coin, tormenting her as she tormented the other one of him who would leave her, sick to his soul, only to go back to her because she was helpless without him and because he had been that boy with his back against the chimney in the attic of the cabin on the Creek, biting down on his teeth to still their chattering while the blast roared down from the hills with the thin high howl of roaming wolf packs in it and he whimpered, "Ma!"

The cab drew up and stopped. He opened the door and stepped down, and the dog leaped after him. They were on the Twenty-fourth Street side of the Hoffman House, at the bar-room entrance. Drops of moisture dripped from the cabby's rubber helmet, from his handle-bar mustache, and trickled

down his rubber coat. He peered at Rand and the dog through the mist.

"You don't want a dog, do you?" Rand handed him a bill.

"A dog, sir?" The cabby examined the bill in the blurred light of a cab lamp, and his eyes popped. He pocketed the bill before he shook his head. "Don't know what good he'd be to me, sir."

"Neither do I!" Rand opened the barroom door, and the dog shot through ahead of him.

Here were soft lights pointing up works of art. Here were highhearted dandies in white ties, silk hats, and Inverness capes. Here were crisp, white-coated bartenders, the clink of glasses, the gurgle from bottles, chuckles and chaffing, slaps on the back. A black porter in gold braid pounced upon the dog, laying hold of him by the scruff of the neck, but he might better have grabbed a greased pig. Yelping, the dog wriggled away to crouch at Rand's feet. Heads turned toward him in a sudden silence, and bartenders leaned over the bar, peering down.

"Haven't we met before?" Rand's eyes narrowed upon the porter.

"He ain't—that ain't youah dog, Mistah Bole?"

"The hell he isn't!"

"Yes, suh!" The porter leaped aside, bowing and scraping. "Yes, suh!"

The dog slunk along at Rand's heels as he strode past Bouguereau's softly lighted Nymphs and Satyrs, past Correggio's Narcissus, Demonceaux's Holy Mother, Chelminski's Russian Mail Carrier, Etienne's Boudoir of an Eastern Princess. At a pedestal supporting Ball's statue of Eve in marble the dog tarried, and the corners of Rand's mouth twitched.

"Come on, Tige!" He snapped his fingers.

In the gold and copper and silver lobby the encircling wreaths of lights blazed high in their gleaming chandeliers on the tall pillars. Here were the mixed scents of flowers and costly perfumes. Ladies in furs drew aside their skirts with a rustle, smothering gasps and clutching at their escorts' arms as the dog brushed by at Rand's heels. Rand stopped at the desk

in front of the main offices, and a clerk with a clipped blond mustache smiled quick welcome.

"Good evening, Mr. Bole!" The clerk bowed. "Welcome home, sir, and—" He turned pale, staring down. "That isn't—that isn't your dog, sir?"

"That's my dog! Let me have my mail, will you?"

Still pale, the clerk handed him a telegram, come within the hour. Rand ripped it open. From Moffat. His face drew still as he read it, and the nerve began to twitch in his cheek. It said, "Immediate presence imperative." *The line was held up at the trestle.* He looked up, and the clerk with the blond mustache had vanished into thin air. In his place stood Travis, the cherub-faced manager, with a pink pearl gleaming in his shirt front and the camellia in his lapel. Imperturbable as ever, Travis ignored the dog. He beamed and washed his chubby hands.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Bole!" Travis was every inch the bearer of glad tidings. "And we have a little surprise for you this evening. Ah—Mrs. Bole has arrived."

"Mrs. Bole?" With the telegram in his hand Rand leaned idly against the desk. "And when did Mrs. Bole arrive?"

"Four days ago, Mr. Bole." Travis slid over it smoothly. "And lacking any information as to your whereabouts, a fact I didn't mention to Mrs. Bole"—his eyes met Rand's blandly—"since she was determined upon surprising you, we made her as comfortable as possible in the suite adjoining yours. The parlors are connected by sliding doors, and—"

"I see." Rand folded Moffat's telegram carefully and stowed it into an inner pocket.

"Of course, you understand that I hesitated to spoil the little surprise—"

"Yes, I know." Rand leaned against the desk again, his hands in his pockets, watching the parade of fashion, theater-bound. "Did Archbold call?"

"Mr. Archbold? Yes, Mr. Archbold called. As I remember it, he seemed to think we hadn't delivered his message to you." His eyes met Rand's, still bland. "And I assured him I'd get to the bottom of it."

"I see." The nerve twitched in Rand's cheek as he looked across the lobby. "Too bad he didn't know Mrs. Bole had arrived. They're friends of long standing." He turned to Travis, and his eyes were as bland as Travis's own. "Or did you tell him?"

"As it happens, I didn't, Mr. Bole." Travis cleared his throat apologetically, and then he brightened. "However, he was informed because he asked to have his card sent up to Mrs. Bole, and I saw to it personally."

"I see!" Rand turned on his heel, but Travis was still with him, personally seeing him and the dog across the lobby to the elevator, his tails bobbing and the gaiters dancing. The operator opened the elevator door, and the dog shot through ahead of Rand. The operator's jaw dropped. He looked at Travis.

"Fine dog you have here, Mr. Bole!" Travis beamed.

"I knew you'd take to him, Travis!" Rand's eyes were still bland as the operator closed the door.

He unlocked the door of his suite, lit the lamp with the lace parasol shade, tossed his hat and coat over a chair, smoothed his hair in the mirror over the console, and straightened his tie. In the mirror the sliding doors were reflected, and his whole body vibrated with rage as he stood there looking at the reflection. He turned to the doors then, clicked the lock back, threw the doors open, and stood in the aperture.

She was there in a round high-backed easy chair under the lamp, her hair, blue-black in the light, caught smoothly back into the snood. She had been embroidering, and the dog sniffed at a ball of wool at her feet. In the one quick glance he marked the jonquils in a transparent vase on the console. The water in the vase was fresh and clear. Through the open bedroom door he marked the neat order. She leaned down to scratch the dog behind an ear and, straightening, looked from the dog to Rand.

"An unexpected pleasure!" His eyes were hard, mocking, amused. "To what am I indebted for it?"

She took her time, feeling for words. The woolwork hid her

hands in her lap, but the pulse pounded in her temple and at the base of her throat above the garnet brooch.

"I told Miss Flora—that I was coming—to be with my husband—and with my friend, Mrs. Preston."

"With your friend, Mrs. Preston?" He leaned idly against a door, his hands in his pockets. "Then we should have met before this, you and I."

She said nothing, smoothing the woolwork in her lap.

"Wouldn't you say so?" he inquired.

"Yes—if I said anything, Rand."

"*The truth is that you came to meet John Archbold.*" It cut across the room with the swish of a blacksnake.

"No—that isn't the truth, Rand."

"You knew that he reads the paper, didn't you?" He was gentle again.

"Yes—I knew."

"And you knew that he'd be here!"

"Yes—I knew—he'd be here, Rand."

"And you received him!"

Her chin went up, and her eyes met his. She said, "Yes, I received him because I knew he came—half as my friend, and because I wanted him to know that I—stand with you."

He had her then. He had her cold. He laid his cards on the table, spreading wide a pat hand.

"Unfortunate that you committed yourself," he said. "The line is held up at the trestle."

"The—trestle?" Her hands gripped the arms of the chair.

"The trestle! Oh, don't worry. I can drive it through. *Will you sign Lennon Oil over to me?*"

Her eyes dropped to his shoes, creased across the toes. They looked up, and they were wet with tears. She said, "Rand—I've told you. I can't, and I won't."

White-hot fury gripped him, and born of it was the determination to break her once and for all to his will. His eyes went beyond her to the bedroom door and came back to her, hard, mocking, amused. She brushed the back of a hand across her eyes as if to shut out the sight of him.

"So you said you came to be with your husband, did you?" A cold little smile played around his mouth. "*And, by God, you'll be with your husband.*"

He had taken one step toward her when he heard the low growl and looked down. He saw the dog at her feet, set for the leap at his throat, his teeth bared and his tail weaving. *And he had taken both of them from the gutter.* His hand closed over the back of a gilt chair. He swung the chair high.

"*Rand!*"

He heard it—and brought the chair down. He felt the crashing impact, heard the dog's agonized yelp, saw him slink on three legs into a corner to cower there, whimpering. He knew then that he was free. *Free.* He was one man at last and a single entity. *Free.* Petty? Let her scream for Papa until her throat split. *And Mrs. Rand Bole?* He turned upon her, the cold little smile around his mouth. She sat there, with the back of her hand over her eyes, in a kind of doomed passiveness, and the flinch of her flesh at his touch was reflex. She spoke once.

"*Rand—you couldn't.*"

"I couldn't?" He had her in his arms. He carried her into the bedroom and kicked the door shut behind him. "*The hell I couldn't.*"

A FULL MOON HUNG HIGH ABOVE THE TRESTLE. THE smoke from the pipeliners' fire curled upward, and their voices rose with it to the lilt of Sweeney's harmonica:

*"O-o-o-h, say the ocean was whisky and I was a duck,
I'd dive to the bottom and take one sweet suck.
To hell with my wife and babies that bawl,
The best way to live is with no wife at all."*

Dark silhouettes in the moonlight were the grub tent that housed the dice games, the bunk tents from which came guttural snores, the work train down the track that had rolled up with the load of section hands.

Better than a full day now the pipeliners had marked time, and for all of them, the section hands could tamp their ballast and repair their ties until hell froze over. During the day the two camps had exchanged compliments.

"What's holdin' yez, yez Irish scum?" It was an inquiry from the Irish railroaders. "Is it yez wait f'r a priest t' shrive yez?"

"So it's a tent meetin' yez wouldn't know when yez see one, yez ignorant low-down!" The Irish pipeliners tossed it back.

A matter of hours would have seen them under the trestle with the line and rolling on. The teams had crossed over, stringing the pipe along the right of way, and the three lengths of pipe to go under the trestle lay piled on this side. Less than fifteen hundred feet from the trestle, the pipeliners had been making time, and the way was clear. Duggan, the foreman, sat his horse, one eye down the track. Mike Sullivan, the trigger-tempered straw boss, walked the line, swinging his pick handle.

The hammer tamped against a collar, keeping time as the pipeliners bent to the tongs, setting up joints, and their chant rang out. High *up* and low *down*. High *up* and low *down*, high *up* and low *down*, high *up* and—

The shrill and challenging whistle of a train cut through the chant. The hammer stopped in mid-air, the tongs halfway of a turn. Duggan's horse reared up on his hind legs from the suddenly tightened rein. Mike Sullivan, stopped in his tracks, said "Chr-r-rist!" The pipeliners looked along the line at each other out of the corners of their eyes, swabbing leathery foreheads and necks with red bandannas as the work train rolled up. An engine and tender, two bunk cars and caboose. From the bunk cars tumbled the section hands with their picks and shovels to set about tamping ballast along the track, and enough of them to tamp all the ballast between them and hell! The work train backed up to a spur down the track and settled down like a setting hen. Mike Sullivan shifted his cud of tobacco from one cheek to the other and, cursing, spat.

Duggan rode for the nearest telegraph station as if the devil were after him, and he still cooled his heels there, waiting orders from Rand Bole, with not a man on the line but knew Bole well enough to swear by St. Patrick what Bole's orders would be. Bole would say, "Keep 'er rolling, come hell and high water." And to hell with Rand Bole.

They were pipeliners and, given the way, they'd lay as much line in a day as the next gang, but Rand Bole's fight with the railroads was his own. The teams toiled up with the grub and bunk tents; they pitched camp and marked time, content. The moon hung high, the stars shone done, the fire blazed cozily, dice rolled along the plank table in the grub tent, and from the bunk tents the snores vied with the lilt of Sweeney's harmonica.

*"O-o-o-o-h, I'd suck and I'd dive, and I'd dive and I'd suck,
A frolickin', rollickin', hell-raisin' duck.
To hell with your tongs! To hell with your pick!
Show me the man that got rich with 'em quick."*

It echoed back from the hills, covering the galloping thud of a horse's hoofs. The horse stumbled to a halt, and as a man swung down from the saddle to stride toward the fire it dropped its head and blood gushed from its nostrils. The man strode to the circle around the fire and stood there, a tall, mud-caked figure with his hands in his pockets. Sweeney's harmonica stopped halfway of a run. Their voices died in their throats. Bole—Bole, himself, and a long way from his yellow-headed doxy this night!

His eyes came to rest on Mike Sullivan. Mike got slowly to his feet and shuffled across the circle. Raking him with his eyes, Bole let him stand there a full minute, shuffling in his boots.

"You're through, Sullivan." Bole looked at his watch, and his voice was gentle. "Ten minutes to get out of camp."

Mike Sullivan dropped his pick handle and walked toward a bunk tent in the deepening silence. Bole's glance flicked Sweeney and his harmonica.

"Get 'em up, Sweeney!"

"Yes, sor!" Sweeney picked up Mike Sullivan's club. "Yes, sor!"

The men tumbled from the grub tent before Sweeney's swinging club, and from the bunk tents, stuffing the tails of their flannel shirts into their pants, their boots flapping unlaced. Hitching their galluses over their shoulders, they lined up before the fire, and Rand Bole stood there facing them.

Here were bearded, barrel-chested Irishmen, bull-necked and with the shoulders of an ox, with sinews that bulged under their red flannel undershirts, toughened by picks and shovels and tongs; men who prided themselves on the ditch they could dig in a day and on the line they could lay; men who fought at the drop of a hat in rough-and-tumbles, in brawls in saloons and dance halls. Here and there an eye was missing, and its empty socket yawned evilly in the shadows. Here and there were purple scars cutting into beards, wide gaps between yellow tusks of teeth. Driven to it, these men would tear the trestle apart with their bare hands.

Rand's voice cut around them with the swish of a black-

snake in it. The right of way under the trestle was the Seaboard's by right of purchase, and they were going to take it, and the first section hand that barred their way would crawl back on his belly to the bunk car that brought him. Ten men on the line. Five to stab the pipe and five on the tongs. The rest would clear their way. No guns. Picks, shovels, tongs, fists, and each man for himself.

"Step up, ten of you!"

It swished through the air, and not a man moved. Only the crackle of the fire cut the silence until from somewhere in the shadowed rear of their ranks came a catcall. Rand's eyes blazed, his hands knotted into fists, and then his face drew still, impassive. They were sixty to his one, and they thought they had him cold, did they? The nerve twitched in his cheek as his eyes ran swiftly over their ranks, picking up faces he knew, choosing his man; one man to be the spark that set the fire. Flannigan . . . Sweeney . . . Cassidy . . . Naylor . . . Maguire. There stood Willie Maguire, hunched into his shoulders. Willie Maguire from the Creek, with his fat, foolish face, pock-marked, and with his little mischievous eyes, easy prey. Willie was his man. Through Willie, Rand's voice rolled over them, impassioned and resonantly cadenced.

Yes, he had asked for volunteers. And why? Because there were men among them who would turn a deaf ear to his call. Men, did he say? No, not men. These were not men. These were bleating sheep in man's form. And let them turn a deaf ear, the craven who lived in fear, shivering in their boots. These? He spat into the fire. Let these huddle here by the fire, shrinking at the thought of a bloodied nose. He asked of them only that they keep out of the way.

His glance flicked Willie. Willie hunched deeper into his shoulders. He shot an uneasy glance toward the bunk cars down the track. He looked out of the corner of his eye at the men around him in the firelight. They yawned, heavy-eyed and heavy-jowled. They spat and wiped the backs of their hands across their mouths. Willie brightened and spat too.

Rand's voice dropped. His words were clipped, fraught

with cold menace. These sheep in men's form! It was on the backs of their ilk that Rockefeller and the railroads had built the monopoly that, coiling like a giant anaconda, would squeeze them dry. Rockefeller? Even now that monopoly trembled in the balance before the clenched fists of men who were men! And when that empire had crumbled to dust, when the bellies of the laggards were empty and their children cried for bread, let them remember the trestle even as he remembered how they had sat by the fire and, remembering, turned a deaf ear.

"Go milk your grudging cow!" he would tell them then. "Go plow your sterile acres."

Shivering in his boots, Willie shrank. Once more he looked uneasily toward the work train down the track. Once more he looked out of the corner of his eyes at the men around him. Cool-eyed, they stood pat on their brawn. Willie swelled again to his size. Thumbs in his galluses, he threw his chest out and spat toward the fire.

But the men among them? Men who counted life dear only as they lived it, fearless? Men who stood on their feet and gave blow for blow, backing down before no doubled fist? Rand's voice soared again, warm with fellowship. There was wine in it. Wine for Willie. Wine and women and song. These men who stayed with him now, Rand Bole would remember too. And in that day when Standard Oil had been forever humbled, in that day of the Seaboard's swelling prosperity, they would have their share in it. Theirs would be the full pocket, the snug roof, the spread table.

"These are men!" he would remember then. "And a man is worthy of his hire."

And he had Willie cold. Willie's mischievous little eyes lit up, dreaming in the firelight. One quick turn of the spinning wheel, and Willie would be back once more at the Stevens Hotel in New York, a man about town in wide pantaloons and congress gaiters, his hard hat jauntily aslant. Once more Willie would be lighting cigars with dollar bills before bulging eyes. As if in his sleep, Willie stepped forward, drawn by the warm voice. Catcalls followed him and a raucous guffaw.

From the shadowed rear a gruff voice drawled, "Keep 'er rollin', Maguire!"

Willie stumbled toward Rand. He turned to face the catcalls, blinking in baffled stupefaction at finding himself there. And as he stood there, grinning sheepishly, the firelight flickered across his fat and foolish face, hideously pock-marked. The catcalls died away into deepening silence. There was an uneasy shifting of boots in half-frozen mud as hard-eyed pipeliners stood there, their gaze fixed on Willie's pitted face. Then there was a quickening in their ranks, a running murmur that swelled to a surging undercurrent that burst into Irish battle cry.

"And where's y'r guts, yez Irish scum?" Two pipeliners stepped forward to spit on their hands and knock the handles from their picks. Two more, and then two. The spark had caught, and the fire raged.

"Stand back, sor!" Wild-eyed, Sweeney swung his pick handle. "Hell's broke loose."

They fell upon the pipeline like thieves in the night. The tap of the hammer against a collar was stealthy, keeping time. Backs bent to the tongs, and the chant was muted. High *up* and low *down*, high *up* and low *down*. They neared the trestle, and the shrill, challenging whistle of the train shrieked warning. The train steamed from the spur toward the trestle. It stopped to disgorge the section hands. They swarmed along the track, down over the embankment; pick handles cracked against shovels, and the battle was on.

It was on with the thud of fists against flesh, screams of agony as thumbs gouged eyes, howls of rage and spurts of blood as noses flattened to masses of pulp and, maddened, men spat teeth from between split lips. It was on with hollow grunts as, caught midriff by swinging boots, they dropped to all fours and rolled over to be trampled under heel. It was on in a howling, cursing, bloody welter of flailing fists and swinging boots, cracking pick handles and shovels and tongs.

It was on, hell-bent—until the railroaders fell back, inch by inch, marking their path with blood and teeth as they fought up the embankment, taking bloody toll for each backward

step. At the top they broke and turned tail, scrambling aboard the bunk cars, crawling toward them on their hands and knees. The wheels of the train began to turn slowly, followed by the curses of the crawling, left behind, and by the pipeliners' shaking fists and triumphant "Yaaaah! Yaaaah!"

Yaaaah! Yaaaah! The engine steamed over the trestle and stopped. Below pipeliners bent to the tongs. Section hands, bloodied and battered, leaned from the doors of the bunk cars, shaking their fists and taunting, "Yaaaaah! Yaaaaah!" Then with a roaring hiss a jet of live steam shot down from the engine's boiler upon the pipeliners below, wrapping them in wet, searing mist, shutting them off in a scalding hell.

And they stayed. They stayed to a man in that soft, white, searing hell. They stayed, swaying with the tongs. High *up* and low *down*, high *up* and low *down*. They stayed until a length of pipe poked its black nose through the white mist on the other side. They stayed until other hands in the clear took over, stabbing, and other backs bent to the tongs. Then they crawled from under on their bellies; but, crawling, they shook parboiled fists as they yelled, "*Keep 'er rollin'!*"

IT WAS APRIL IN THE HILLS, AND MOUNTAIN RILLS, spring-fed, trickled over brown lichened stones through haunts of the snowdrop and arbutus trailing in clusters under drifted leaves, their shy perfume mingling with the scent of pine. Merging, the rills formed rushing brooks that tumbled, singing, downhill to swell valley streams bearing their burden of logs to Tuna Creek; an ever-lightening burden, and oil was now undisputed lord of the valley, but the shouts of rafters and loggers still echoed from hill to hill with a tramping under-current of big-hole boots as tours changed.

Ben Hogan, "the man from hell," now turned evangelist, exhorted sparse audiences to the sawdust trail. In a wooded dell an arena was under secret construction where a bull and a bear were to be pitted against each other in a fight to the death. Betting odds were seven to five on the bull already housed at Coffin's livery in a box stall next to the bear. On the Exchange the odds were still even on the Seaboard Pipeline, rolling on over hills and through valleys to the swish of black-snakes, the tamp of the hammers against collars, the chant of high *up* and low *down*. And the wheel spun on.

In the library at Bole Hall, George Berry, graying attorney at law, scholar and gentleman and temperance man to boot, laid his portfolio on the desk. Waiting, he stood before the portrait by Sargent of a woman in a blue lace gown. April sunlight, drifting through leaded windows, played over it as he studied it through the steel-rimmed spectacles, his arms folded across his chest. Here was more than Sargent, the suave portraitist, as if, reflected in his subject, the artist had glimpsed

some greatness in himself and the glimpse had lent power to his brush.

There in the suavely skilled strokes that were Sargent was the blue-black hair caught close to the small head and drawn high. There were the finely drawn eyebrows like the spread of a blackbird's wings, the clear skin and chiseled features, the slender throat. He had caught with smooth skill the sheeriness of the lace, utilizing its every diaphanous fold. And then, half hidden in a fold of it, was the hand that held the fan in her lap: a slim hand, sensitive and flexible, but with some inspired stroke of his brush Sargent had given it the strength of tempered steel. Molly!

George Berry had known her since the days when, a young man in a stock collar and sober cravat and straight coat, he had taught the village school, reading law at night. She had been born in the image of the sad-eyed, languishing mother who brought her to him, but he had known on sight that there was something in the dark-eyed child she could never have had from the mother; something she must have had from Mike Bannon himself. He saw more of it in the venturing mind, quick to see an advantage; behind the loneliness in the eyes that had seen too much for a child; in the set of her pointed chin. Given time, this child would hold her own with Mike Bannon!

The mother had died before that time, but the child had had a friend. It was Murphy, Mike Bannon's tipsy hostler. And as the child's body grew taller and rounded out, Murphy called upon the schoolmaster, cold sober for the occasion and by far the less ruddy for it, with his every nerve twitching from the denial.

"'Tis this kind of man Mike Bannon is, Schoolmaster." Murphy looked down at the battered hat he twisted between his knees. "If he begets him a daughter, 'tis for his own profit."

George Berry bought the pistol himself, and that day. No hand with a gun and sick at the sight of it, he took it to Murphy in the stable.

"Teach her to shoot," he told Murphy. "To shoot first and

cry afterward." And he knew only relief when Murphy reported with strutting pride, "She could take a man dead center o' the heart at fifty yards, Schoolmaster." Murphy scratched his head, weighing it. "And I don't know—but what she would."

And while no rafter or logger ever owned to having looked along the barrel of the pistol from the wrong end, Molly and her pistol became a legend among them. Veterans on the river had a formula for initiating the greenhorn.

"And you come to the Bannon House now," they advised with a lecherous wink and a poke of a thumb in the greenhorn's ribs, "just lay yer head on th' next pillow to a dark-eyed lass, name o' Molly, fer me."

Her day at the village school had been short. Mike Bannon had seen to that. But George Berry had shared his little library with her, leaving the books with Murphy in the stable, and at night in her room over the kitchen she had slipped through the printed page into other worlds and other ages. Somehow she had survived, salamandrine, through fire!

She was eighteen when the white-haired barrister from Dublin stepped into George Berry's office one day to make inquiries about Mike Bannon and his daughter Mary. Mike Bannon he knew, and the cool eyes in the barrister's head struck fire at the thought of Mike Bannon.

"A rascal, sir!" he told George Berry. "A man who would rob his mother."

He had been troubled at what he heard about Mike Bannon's daughter.

"What's to become of her?" He shook his head. "She hasn't a soul there. . . . She's the last of them."

"You might better hand the money to Mike Bannon and be done with it," George Berry said.

"I'll see the fellow in hell first, man!" The barrister struck the table between them with his doubled fist. So they had conferred, the two of them, with the judge at the county seat. When the barrister would have told the judge about Mike Bannon the judge held up his hand, stopping him.

"A rascal, sir!" the judge told the barrister. "God A'mighty, such likker!"

Molly's heritage was left in trust for her then with George Berry, and it was bad blood between him and Mike Bannon.

"'Twas me now," Murphy warned, uneasy, "I'd buy th' second gun, Lawyer."

Rand Bole! And George Berry had felt it was that in her she had from Mike Bannon which made Molly look toward Music Mountain with the young man from the Creek. There was twice her heritage in timber there, and always the timber if oil failed them. George Berry had been careful only to wrap the protection of the law around her, keeping the reins of Lennon Oil tight in her hands. Three times straight, then, within five minutes, Rand Bole had laid Mike Bannon flat on his own barroom floor, and the third time Mike Bannon chose to lie still, his loaded butt end of a billiard cue beside him.

"'Twas a sight I thought never t' see in this life!" Murphy's eyes glowed with the telling of it.

George Berry's gaze dropped from the portrait by Sargent to the bisque shepherdess on the mantel with gilded hair and eyes as blue as the sea in the sun. . . . Rand Bole! A strange and driven blend of strength and weakness, of compassion and ruthlessness, of vision and blindness—a man who was both the favorite and the pawn of Fortune. George Berry's eyes turned again to the portrait as his thought went to his portfolio on the desk.

One other man, dying, had caught the glimpse; a little man with a nose hooked like an eagle's beak; kindly and shrewd but increasingly bewildered, shrugging, palms up, as he said, "Myself, I dunno. I am only Simon, the Jew peddler. Mebbe the great Jehovah—He knows. You say so, Lawyer?" To Simon had been granted that moment of clearing vision as Death's door swung wide and, making his will, he died, content.

A door opened behind him in the library, and George Berry turned from the portrait to see Molly in the flesh, a slight figure in a soft cashmere gown, with a quaint garnet brooch

catching the frill of lace at her throat. In the dark eyes was a quality of weariness that left her numb, sense-free, and said she never expected to be rested. Upon her was a detachment from her surroundings, as if this very room were a place she had once known, but a place with which she no longer had any associations. She sat beside him at the desk, her head against the high carved back of her chair, her hands relaxed on the arms.

"We've found nothing at the Bannon House yet." George Berry polished his spectacles, thinking.

Mike Bannon had died in delirium, intestate, and no trace had been found of his wealth. Murphy knew only that Mike Bannon trusted no man, hiding his money somewhere always within his reach. The banks confirmed it. Regularly Mike Bannon had appeared at one bank or another with the contents of his brimming dishpan in tightly tied canvas bags, exchanging the hard-bought coins of rafter and logger, driller and roustabout and pipeliner for crisp new bills. The bills he rolled tight and tied with a string, stowing them into his pocket.

No trace of them had been found in his room at the Bannon House, and as Murphy and George Berry fanned out from there, searching, Murphy had fallen prey to a dark thought: Mike Bannon had found a way to take it with him! Yesterday as they searched in the attic, the two of them, ripping up floor boards, Murphy shook his head, hopeless, as he said, "'Twas th' kind of man Mike Bannon was, Lawyer, never let his money bide so far away from him!"

Polishing the spectacles, George Berry said, "All the mattresses at the Bannon House were burned, weren't they?"

"Yes, all of them."

He couldn't tell whether she followed his thought or not as he sat there polishing, seeing flames lick around a filthy, stinking mattress—seeing it go up in clouds of smoke, and Mike Bannon's hidden hoard with it. Surely Mike Bannon must have turned over in his grave! George Berry adjusted his spectacles and opened the portfolio on the desk.

First came the document that transferred Lennon Oil to

Rand Bole, needing only Molly's signature. He handed it to her; she glanced at it, wordless, and laid it aside on the desk. Next came the letter from Celestia Dwyer to Mrs. Rand Bole. It said that through no fault of her own Celestia was in straitened circumstances, and it suggested that, in view of the very close relationship between their two families, Mrs. Bole might think it wise to help her.

In the safe at George Berry's office was its companion piece: a receipt for a sum of money, and above her signature he had caused Celestia to write, "In consideration of my silence in the matter of any relation between Rand Bole and my niece, Pleasance Preston." Caught, Celestia had wriggled desperately, insisting that by the very close relationship she had meant only the fact that the Boles and the Dwyers had been neighbors on the Creek.

"In that case," George Berry said, cold-eyed, "I'll advise Mrs. Bole to hand your letter to her husband, since that was a relationship in which she has no interest."

It brought Celestia around. The man wasting upstairs in the great walnut bed was a sample of Rand Bole's handiwork. And little good her gain could do Celestia without Petty's discovery of evidences of new well-being. Celestia hadn't thought far enough ahead, so there would be more money in another mattress.

"I think you can tear it up," George Berry said to Molly. "She won't ask for more."

"There isn't any more." Molly tore the letter across. "The timber's gone, and Lennon Oil is Rand's."

There was another letter. It was from Father Streate, priest of a parish on the River Lennon in Ireland. It accounted with meticulous care for the expenditure of certain sums of money: so many bushels of grain, so many bushels of potatoes, so many suckling pigs to be fattened.

"It was a hard winter here," Father Streate wrote, "but the Holy Mother of us all guided the hand of Her daughter there."

Molly laid the letter aside with the transfer of Lennon Oil.

She said, "Yes—it was in the mattress." She laid her head against the back of the chair again and shut her eyes.

And then there was Simon's will. Pending George Berry's investigation of the little paper-backed notebook, sole contents of Simon's worn money belt, Molly knew only that Simon, kinless, had willed his all to her. Dying, Simon had had Dr. Olds write it. Murphy and the girl, Kitty Gordon, had witnessed it. It was brief. It said, "All property, real and personal, of which I die possessed, I will and bequeath to Mary Bole, daughter of Mike Bannon and wife of Rand Bole."

"You haven't seen Simon's will, Molly." He handed it to her, and she sat looking down at it. She looked up to say, "His horses! He loved them. . . . Where are they?"

"Murphy has them," George Berry said, and as Molly leaned her head against the back of the chair again, her eyes shut, he opened the little paper-backed notebook, filled with Simon's cramped figures. Simon had written his figures even on the covers, sparing of paper space. George Berry began to read. So many shares of stock in this, so many shares in that. So many bonds, so many mortgages, so much cash in this bank and that bank along Simon's route. Stocks, bonds, mortgages, cash. Turning a page, George Berry read on. He stopped to look up at Molly. He said, "This is from Simon to you, Molly."

"*Simon?*" Molly opened her eyes. Her hands tightened on the arms of the chair. "*Simon?*"

"Simon was a very rich man—a very rich man indeed!" George Berry read on to the last figure. He sat looking down at the book, still incredulous himself. "And all of it gilt-edged—unless we except the Standard Oil stock. How would Simon come by so much of it?"

Wondering, he turned to Molly, and then looked quickly away, his facial muscles rigid. Stumbling alone in the shadows, she had felt a staying hand—felt it press a stout staff into hers—and she had heard a voice say, "Yes—the great Jehovah, He knows. I tell you the truth!" Her head went down in her arms on the desk, and George Berry could only sit silent. In the end

he could only leave her like that and shut the door softly behind him.

In the entrance hall, Kitty Gordon, in black taffeta and white organdy apron and cap, once one of Hogan's girls, waited with his hat. She had something to say to him. He was sure of it when, handing him his hat, she lingered, her eyes downcast as she ran the hem of her apron through nervous fingers.

"What is it, Kitty?" He stood there with his portfolio under one arm and his hat in his hand.

"It—it's her, sir." Kitty worried a corner of her apron, looking down. "I—I dream all the time that—that she's going away."

She looked up, and a shaft of light filtering through stained glass overhead fell across her pitted face. Her eyes were depthless, betraying the shallow and haunted mind behind them. It was the whispers in the servants' dining room that prompted Kitty's dreams; the whispers and the fear for her haven.

"She'll come back, Kitty." He said it quickly to reassure her. Then he repeated it slowly to reassure himself. "She'll come back—someday."

HERE IT WAS, AND AT LAST. WALKING BEAMS creaked to a stop for the day, and fires were doused under boilers. Bands blared in concert saloons and dance halls. Flags flew from windows along Main Street; flags and printed banners. The banners said, "Down with Rockefeller!" They said, "To hell with the Standard!" They said, "Three cheers for the Seaboard!" They said, "Let 'er roll!" On the Exchange last bets were laid on the Seaboard pipeline, and oil certificates changed hands in a last-minute frenzy to hoarse shouts of "I'll buy!" and "I'll sell!" The indicator on the wall rose, fell, and then steadied.

The line was over the hills with only the plain ahead of it to the coast. At its temporary terminus tanks had been built, and that afternoon when the Exchange had closed, a trial run of oil would be made through the line. At three o'clock to the minute in the pump station, Rand Bole would throw open the valve of a steam engine. Crowds had already gathered along the line snaking from the pump station across the valley and up the hill. Down Main Street came the defiant notes of a bugle and the roll of drums, and to the strains of "Brannigan's Band" marched the band of Fire Hose Company No. 1 in scarlet uniforms, gold-braided.

Only Coon Frisbee was downcast. On a corner of the bar in Hotel La Pierre, Coon, morose and apart, dawdled with a pack of cards, cutting for high spade, his right hand against his left hand. Cutting, Coon muttered darkly, "The goddamned pirate!" And cutting again, he muttered, "The goddamned pirate!"

"Who takes the money, Coon?" It came from along the bar. "You or yourself?"

Muttering, Coon leaned an elbow on the bar, one foot on the rail. His head in his hand, he regarded his audience with a somber gaze.

They said, "Come on, Coon!" They said, "Talk to Rockefeller, Coon!" They said, "Tell 'im he's through, Coon!"

Sorrowful, Coon held out his right hand, and there was that in his eye which said he would gladly sever it and hurl it from him.

"Gentlemen," Coon hiccuped, morose, "we have here Mr. Rockefeller."

They said, "To hell with 'im!" They said, "Throw 'im out!" They said, "Spit on 'im, Coon!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Coon wagged a chiding finger. "Mr. Rockefeller is present." He held out his left hand. Dejected, he said, "And we have here Rand Bole!"

Rand Bole! The name fell into a speculative silence. But, by God, he got there, didn't he? He'd laid the line, hadn't he? And through hell and high water! If it worked, the pinch would be on the other foot. In the silence Coon drew himself up, swaying. He pulled down his vest. He buttoned his coat. He straightened his hat on his head and shot his cuffs. He turned to the deck of cards and shuffled them.

"Gentlemen," he hiccuped, "Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Bole will now cut for high spade." He bowed low to his right hand and caught his balance again by a miracle. "Your cut, Mr. Rockefeller!"

Mr. Rockefeller cut the cards in the tense silence, and Coon's eyes bulged. *Mr. Rockefeller had cut the trey of spades.*

They said, "That'll hold 'im!" They said, "Bole's got 'im!" They said, "Licked, by God!"

Suddenly brightening like a sun from behind clouds, Coon bowed to his left hand with a flourish and clutched the bar to stay himself. With all due deference he hiccuped, "Your cut, Mr. Bole!"

Mr. Bole cut the cards in the tense silence, and, his eyes

bulging, Coon slumped against the bar. *Mr. Bole had cut the deuce of spades.*

They said, "Make 'er two out of three, Coon!" They said, "Change hands, Coon!" They said, "Come on there, Bole!"

Coon shuffled the cards and changed hands, muttering. Mr. Rockefeller cut again. Mr. Rockefeller cut the ten of spades.

They said, "The goddamned pirate!" They said, "Hell, there's four of 'em better than the ten!" They said, "Get in there, Bole, and cut!"

Mr. Bole cut, and Coon shook his head, muttering. Mr. Bole had cut the five of spades.

They said, "Make 'er three out of five, Coon!" They said, "Wait, try a new deck, Coon!" They said, "Spit over your shoulder, Coon!"

Coon shuffled the new deck. He spat over his left shoulder. Mr. Rockefeller cut, and a groan ran along the bar. Again Mr. Rockefeller had cut the ten of spades. Mr. Bole cut, and the groan swelled. Mr. Bole had cut the four of spades. Coon leaned an elbow on the bar and, his head in his hand, regarded his audience with somber gaze.

"There you are!" Coon hiccuped wearily. "The goddamned pirate'll do it every damned time!"

They said, "Oh, to hell with high spade!" They said, "Tear 'em up, Coon!" They said, "You're the jinx, Coon!"

But there was that intent look in their eyes as they crowded into the pump station. Waiting, they jingled the coins in their pockets, their hats shoved back on their heads. In the boiler-house outside, a full head of steam was up. The steam engine lay silent on its block like a slumbering giant. The fourteen-ton flywheel was on center, ceiling-high. Beyond it the drive wheel and driven wheel meshed gears, and from the eccentric on the driven wheel slanted the pumps. Rand Bole was set to cut the cards.

Outside the crowd spread out along the line: pipeliners, drillers, tool dressers, roustabouts. The sun had begun its descent behind the ridge of the hills, and shadows lengthened across the valley. In the station there was only the sound of

labored breathing. Eyes turned to Rand Bole, measuring him. He leaned idly against a window sill with Captain Luke Jones, and his face was impassive. Watches snapped open. Outside the crowd stood silent, waiting with their eyes toward the station. Five minutes of three. Four minutes. Three minutes. Two minutes . . . Christ! At one minute of three Captain Jones looked at his watch. He held out his hand to Rand Bole. They shook hands, and then Rand Bole stepped up to the giant slumbering on its block.

Cool as a cucumber, he opened the throttle valve, and a hiss of steam cut the silence. There was the sound of the exhaust as the giant roused. Chh—chh, ch-ch, ch-ch, ch, ch, ch, ch, ch. The flywheel whirled, the pumps pounded, there was a chug and gurgle, and then the sound of oil surging in the line. It was off! Workmen ran along the line. They yelled, "She's rollin'! *She's rollin'!*" Hats sailed into the air. Cheers echoed from hill to hill. From somewhere came Sam Spellacy's rolling bass:

*"Oh, we'll hang the temper screw upon the derrick stand,
Lay away the hammer and the drill,
For thirty days it's taken us to put 'er in the sand
From the little hemlock derrick on the hill."*

Inside the station they yelled, "Come on, Coon!" They stamped above the sound of the exhaust, the whirring flywheel, the meshing gears and pounding pumps, clapping hands to the rhythm as Coon swung into the double shuffle, swaying, bending, sweeping the floor with his hat, his arms a whirling windmill.

*"So-o-o-o they drilled and they drilled and they drilled some
more,
And drillin', m' lad, is a he-man's chore.
Oh, ne'er two men in sadder plight
Than them that met a whore one night."*

It was off! And rolling uphill and down, the oil reached Holmstead. News of it raced on whirring wires across the con-

tinent to flare in black headlines: OIL REACHES HOLMSTEAD VIA PIPELINE. ROCKEFELLER SILENT! At Holmstead another giant and other pumps took over. Again the oil rolled uphill to drop down the other side by gravity into the waiting tanks, its journey over. Again wires whirred and headlines flared: OIL CONQUERS MOUNTAINS. ROCKEFELLER SILENT! Colonel Ekas, ye editor, heaped coals of fire upon Rockefeller's head. In great black letters the colonel thundered, "Thus be it ever when free men shall stand!" And Miss Flora Grey wrote, "Mrs. James Preston has returned from New York. You are with us in our hour of destiny, Mrs. Preston!"

Bole! Bole! It was on every tongue. By God, he got there, didn't he? Bole had cut high spade, hadn't he? He had 'em where the hair was short, didn't he? Now watch Rockefeller wriggle on the hook! Hear the railroads squeal! Let 'er roll! Big-hole boots clumped on the sawdust floors of free concert saloons, in Em Fenton's Dance Hall on Pig Island, in the shoddy parlors of Mother Widdup's Palace of Pleasure. In the banquet hall of Hotel La Pierre, the Swordsmen's Club dined Rand Bole.

Here again were Jacques Bedour's boned turkey with truffles, larded pheasants, caviar, salads, vintage wines, champagne, brandy, and liqueurs, and high overhead flew the Producers' Emblem, a flowing well breaking high over the derrick on a white background. Bole! Bole! Three cheers for Bole! Captain Luke Jones rose from his chair, glass in hand, and silence fell along the table.

"To the only man who ever licked John D. Rockefeller." The captain raised his glass. "Rand Bole!"

Bottoms up! And glasses crashed to the floor. Bole! Bole! Speech! Speech! Flushed with triumph, Rand Bole rose from his chair to stand there at the head of the table, handsome, smiling, and assured, until the resounding cheers died away and a hush fell.

"Gentlemen!" he said, and then his face drew still, impassive. A white ring appeared around his mouth, spreading. The nerve twitched in his cheek. *The wind was at his back.* While the

white ring spread and the nerve twitched, he looked into their faces, and his voice gathered them to him, mellifluous and sonorous, impassioned.

The Seaboard pipeline! The idea that had conquered mountains, the triumph of engineering science, the symbol of the downfall of tyranny and the glorious victory of courage. The pipeline that had wrested the control of an industry from the hands of a dictator and returned it to the hands of the men who produced the oil. To the hands of men who, in producing oil, had known mud and sweat and chance and loss. These were the men who stood victorious tonight, and to the victors belonged the spoils, returned to them by a line whose destiny was in the hands of no one man, determined only by that common bond that had made free men stand as one.

"And so, gentlemen, I, in my turn, would propose a toast, and in the words of that esteemed scholar, our eloquent protagonist, Colonel Ekas." He bowed to the fiery colonel down the table. He raised his glass, and the light from the blazing chandelier caught in the fountain of champagne bubbles. "Gentlemen, to that common bond which binds us with bands of steel, against which monopoly, too long nourished at the generous breast of our valley, shall hurl itself only to perish like the fruit on the frosted vine, and 'like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind!'"

Hear! Hear! Bole! Bole! It drew them to their feet, cheering, and under cover of it Rand glanced over his shoulder. *Yes, by God, the door was open.* Jacques Bedour stood there in the doorway, waiting, an envelope in his hand. He tiptoed up to Rand with a flutter of tails, bowing and scraping in stammering apology in the face of Rand's scowling fury.

"The messenger said it was of vital importance, Mr. Bole."

"Shut that goddamned door, will you?" Rand ripped the envelope open. And it was from Petty. In Petty's round, girl-ish script he read, "*Rand, come at once.*"

He was gone when Captain Luke Jones walked through the bar on his way out. Bole! Bole! It ran along the bar to the tune of popping corks and clinking glasses. On a corner of the bar

Coon Frisbee dawdled with a deck of cards, cutting for high spade, his right hand against his left hand. Coon's white tie was under his ear. The diamond gleamed in his bulging shirt front. Doggedly cutting, Coon muttered, "The goddamned pirate!"

The captain stopped at Coon's elbow. He watched Coon cut and then cut again, muttering. He watched Coon spit over his left shoulder and cut.

"Still running against us, Coon?" he inquired; and, swaying, Coon looked at him, baffled.

"She's rollin', ain't she?" Coon hiccuped. "But, by God, it ain't in th' cards!"

The captain took the deck of cards from Coon and, shuffling them, he laid them on the bar. He stood back, shot his cuffs, and held out his right hand.

"Coon," he said gravely, "we have here Mr. Rockefeller!"

"Th' goddamned pirate!" Coon spat toward a brass spittoon and missed.

The captain held out his left hand.

"Coon," he said, "we have here Mr. Rand Bole"—he lowered his voice and spoke for Coon's ear alone—"and his wife. Mr. Rockefeller will now cut for high spade with Mr. and Mrs. Rand Bole." The captain bowed with deferent grace to his right hand. "Your cut, Mr. Rockefeller!"

Mr. Rockefeller cut the knave of spades, and Coon shook his head, muttering.

"There you are, by God!" Coon spat again and missed. "The goddamned pirate'll do it every time, I tell you!"

Undismayed, the captain bowed to his left hand. He said, "Your cut, Mr. and Mrs. Bole!"

Mr. and Mrs. Bole cut the cards. The captain looked at Coon, his eyes opaque. Coon's eyes bulged. *Mr. and Mrs. Rand Bole had cut the king of spades.*

WITH THE WIND AT HIS BACK, RAND THROTTLED the impulse to stand up in the buckboard and lay the whip along the flanks of the trotters. With the cold sweat crawling, he held them to a prancing walk along Congress Street. In his ears were the echoes of carnival along Main Street, running wide open; the echoes of tooting horns, of racked pianos and thumping drums, wafted through swinging doors. Pistols barked. Lighted candles that greeted a flowing well burned in windows. They said, "Bole! Bole! Three cheers for Bole!"

He knew the wind at his back for what it was. *The wind was fear.* It was fear coiled around his every quivering nerve by that icy blast roaring down from the hills while he lay with his back against the chimney, whimpering, in that cabin on the Creek. It had come upon him again when, rising to speak, he had looked into the faces of those men along the table, realizing that his destiny was in their hands. But he'd got 'em together, hadn't he? *And, by God, he'd hold 'em together.*

Yes, and he knew that damnable urgency to reach the room at Bole Hall, where he felt Ma's hovering presence, for what it was too. It was a reaching out for something stronger than himself to hold his gain. Bracing his back to the wind, he tightened the reins, holding the trotters down. He was no stripling now, doubled into a washtub, mouthing docile answers to the catechism with alternate visions of searing hell-fire and golden gardens already cleared. He was Rand Bole, who had 'em where the hair was short. *Rand Bole, the only man who had ever licked Rockefeller.*

Overhead the arching maples were in new, tender leaf. In

the hills walking beams creaked again, drills thudded into rock. Derrick lanterns like giant fireflies twinkled back at overhanging stars, and gas flares blazed high. Along the ridges was the jagged outline of giant pines, tall and unbending in the moonlight. He heard the lilting echo of "The Bells of Corneville."

Rand, come at once. He remembered it then, and his eyes narrowed. He remembered the way the small slipper dangled from Petty's foot when he picked her up to carry her to the bed, screaming in hysteria. And remembering, he knew no twinge. No whore to be had for a string of bright baubles would summon Rand Bole the second time.

Rand, come at once. He remembered that wild sweet surge of blood in his veins when, still incredulous and awed, he first possessed her. And remembering, he knew only the detachment of satiety. He had no further use for her, and there'd be no more of her at Bole Hall. She'd go back to her whore's nest and stay there, screaming for Papa as long as she liked, and with the street her other resort.

He came to the clogged fountain with the stone deer gleaming white beside it in the moonlight. He turned the trotters in between the stone pillars, held them to a walk along the grass-grown drive. Lamps glowed through the dingy curtains at the long windows. His step across the spreading veranda was dominant. When that man wasting somewhere upstairs died at last, he would owe the very ground that held him to Rand Bole. Rand opened a door quietly, stepped into the hall, and shut the door behind him.

The hall lay in shadow, relieved only by the light through the doorway from a lamp in the front parlor. There was an airlessness, the smell of accumulated dust on curtains and bric-a-brac, the dank smell of damp plaster, and the smell of hovering death. In the shadows the stairway banister curved upward, and his eyes followed it. Yes, somewhere up there lay a man yearning toward the death that, hovering close, eluded him.

He heard the croak of the cockatoo and looked through the doorway into the lighted front parlor. Ah, yes, milady was there! She hadn't heard the trotters in the drive. She hadn't

heard his step across the veranda. She hadn't heard the door open. She was absorbed in playing with the cock. White diaphanous flounces stood out around her like a nimbus, and the light caught in her hair. She was on her knees on the seat of a high-backed chair. With one soft white hand she held tight to a folded paper, and with the other hand she held a slice of apple out to the cock.

The cock was out of his cage. The gold cage, its door wide, was on an ottoman beside the chair. The cock perched on the back of the chair, his claws curved around a cluster of carved grapes. Petty held the slice of apple out to him in her slim fingers, and he stretched his neck, pecking at it, but Petty jerked it back just out of his reach, and her laughter bubbled up. Again she held it out to him. Again the cock reached for it, pecking. Again she jerked it back, her eyes alight, and again that bubbling laughter. Again . . . again.

Again. And then the cock drew his head into his ruff, sulking. This time Petty held the apple closer, almost touching his beak, and once more the cock pecked at it, but Petty popped it into her mouth, munching it, and the cock drew his head back into his ruff. Her laughter bubbled up and, munching, she turned a soft cheek to the cock.

"Kiss Petty! Kiss Petty's cheek!"

The cock drew his head deeper into his ruff, sulking, and Petty's lips drew back over the small white teeth.

"Naughty boy!" Petty shook a scolding forefinger at him. "Petty will put him back in his cage."

She took the folded paper between her teeth and leaned over the arm of the chair for the cage. Whipped, the cock spread his wings, croaking. He stretched his neck toward Petty's cheek, flapping his wings. He struggled, croaking, as she caught him between her two hands and thrust him into the cage. She shut the door of the cage and, pursing her red mouth, shook a forefinger at the imprisoned bird.

"Naughty boy! Naughty, naughty boy! He doesn't love Petty."

On his perch, the cock drew his head deep into his ruff

while Petty, humming to herself, stood before the tall mirror over the mantel. She tightened a curl around a forefinger, with the paper between her teeth. She perked the ruffle around the low, square-cut décolletage. Then she caught sight of a reflection of a man in white tie and tails, handsome and assured, with his eyes narrowed upon her. He leaned idly in the doorway, his hands in the pockets of his topcoat, his hat still jauntily aslant on his head.

She whirled from the mirror. She threw her arms wide in a gesture of flying, the folded paper clutched tight in one hand. Her voice was childlike and breathless, enraptured and abandoned. She was out of her head, incoherent, babbling, her words tumbling over each other.

"Rand, we're free! And it's ours, Rand, all of it. It's ours, I tell you! She was here, and she's gone. She's gone to Ireland, and it's ours. We're free, Rand. *We're free.*"

She whirled, dancing, in a swirl of ephemeral flounces, with her arms spread wide, with wild ecstasy in her every motion, and again came that tumbling torrent of rapture.

"Paris! Oh, Rand, we'll have breakfast at Tortoni's. Rand, we'll drive down the Champs-Élysées. We'll have apéritifs at Philippe's. We'll go to the Opéra-Comique, and we'll dance at Jardin Mabille. Paris! Paris and Vienna."

Those weren't sapphires that flashed at her breast as she whirled in ecstasy, out of her head. Those weren't sapphires at her breast and on her arms. Those weren't sapphires—they were diamonds. *They were diamonds.* He saw the flash of the diamond-circled pearl on her finger.

Breathless, she dropped into the chair beside the cock in his cage, the paper clutched tight in her hand as he stood there, rigid, his eyes upon her. She fought for breath, and the white breasts rose and fell. She spread the paper wide, holding it up for him to see.

"Rand, it's ours. Look! You see it? Music Mountain is ours. Lennon Oil is ours. We're free, Rand. *We're free.*"

She was out of the chair, pirouetting, her arms outflung, the

lamplight caught in her bright curls, the flounces swirling to reveal the small dancing slippers.

"Let them whisper! Let them talk! We'll never come back, Rand, and servants are servants there."

He saw it then. As if it blazed across his vision, written in letters of fire, he saw that urgency to reach that room at Bole Hall *for what it was*. Whirling, beside herself, Petty saw him in the mirror. She saw him walk toward her, his face livid and wrung. She stopped and stood still, her bosom rising and falling, the ecstasy in her eyes and the paper clutched tight in her hand. She turned from the mirror; her eyes, blue as the sea in the sun, flew to him and then widened. One hand went to her mouth. She backed away from him step by step as he came on, and then the mantel stopped her. He caught her wrist in his hand, and her lower lip protruded.

"Rand! Rand, you're hurting me!"

"She's gone?" His grip tightened on the slim wrist. His voice was gentle when he said, "She's gone? You lie."

She babbled, incoherent, as he forced her slowly to her knees in a foam of flounces.

"You lie." He held her there, babbling up at him. "Damn you, say you lie."

She fought back at him on her knees. Her mouth twisted; her face contorted. She sank her teeth into his hand, and the blood trickled across the back of it. He laid the flat of his hand across her soft cheek, and her head spun around on the slim neck. "Papa!" Her scream of terror rose high and shrill. He hurled her from him, and she lay screaming at his feet while the cock beat his wings against the bars of his cage, screeching. There was the paper clutched tight in her hand. There were the diamonds winking up at him from her soft white arms. But she lied. She lied with that little red tongue of hers. *She lied.*

"Papa!" It rang in his ears as, standing in the buckboard, he brought the whip down along the trotters' flanks. "Papa!" He heard it as the buckboard careened between the stone pillars.

He brought the whip down again and again. The trotters' flying shoes struck fire on stone. Flecks of foam from their frothing mouths whipped past him, and he lashed at them again. The buckboard careened under the stone arch, swaying on two wheels along the drive that wound through the park. His eyes raced ahead of them to the spreading outlines of Bole Hall on the crest of the rise, the lighted windows.

And he was in time. The victoria stood under the portecochere, waiting. Thomas sat there on the box, and she was there in the carriage with the luggage. He hurled the reins from him, the whip. He leaped over the wheels. The trotters galloped on toward the stable, and the buckboard careened after them. He stopped in his tracks at the carriage, with the blood roaring in his ears.

No, she wasn't there. She wasn't there. It was the girl, Kitty Gordon, sitting there with the luggage in bonnet and cloak. Turning on his heel, he was across the veranda, through the grilled doors, racing up the marble stairs and down the softly carpeted hall. He threw the door of that room open, kicked it shut behind him, and stood with his back against it.

And he was in time. She was there. *He saw her.* Her image stamped itself on his brain in minute detail. She sat at the desk, making a last entry in one of the account books. She wore a gray walking suit. It was bound in black braid. The tight jacket buttoned over the swell of her breasts to her throat. The nose veil was tied around the small toque. Her purse and gloves lay on the desk. She looked up.

They were in the same room. She was there, but it was as if they looked at each other across a void. And the words failed him, the words and the impassioned voice to hurl the longing across the void that yawned between them.

"Don't leave me." It was hoarse and faltering. Drops of cold sweat, merging, streaked his cheek. "*Don't leave me.*"

He was on his knees then, his arms around the small waist, tightening, and he knew at first touch that he was too late. She wasn't there. She was gone. It was as if the essence of her had sped on ahead and he held only the shell. Fighting it, he

tightened his arms. Gone? She wasn't gone. She couldn't leave him. She was part of him. She was part of his very being. She was there. He was in time. He held her in his arms. She'd lay a cool hand on his forehead. She'd press his face against her breast. He'd hear her say, "It's all right, Rand. Everything's all right."

And she brushed a hand across her eyes as if to shut the sight of him out. He heard her say, "Don't, Rand. Don't let me remember you—on your knees."

On his knees? Rand Bole? He was on his feet, and the words came in a molten bitter flood. On his knees! Who had found oil on Music Mountain? Who had wrung oil from its rock? Who had brought her from the Bannon House to Bole Hall? Who had built Lennon Oil?

"You built it, Rand." She picked up her purse and gloves. "You built it, and it's yours."

She would have left him standing there with his face livid and wrung, with the molten, bitter flood pouring from his mouth. She would have left him without looking back. The flood died in his throat. The longing cut through his heart like a knife. His voice broke. He begged then. He begged as a man, hungering, begs for bread.

"Molly, you'll come back? I'd live for you. I'd die for you. You'll come back? You'll come back—and we'll begin—again?"

She turned at the door to look back. Her eyes dropped to his shoes, too long and creased across the toes. She looked up, and her eyes were wet with tears, but there was detachment in them, as if the tears were for someone who had once stood in those shoes.

"Come back?" Her voice was toneless and tired. "Come back? I—don't—know, Rand."

With it, the door closed behind her, and she was gone. He was alone in that room. Gone? She wasn't gone. She couldn't leave him. She was part of him. She was part of his very being. She'd come back. She'd come at his call.

"Molly!" It was peremptory, summoning. It was the voice of Rand Bole, who held the whip, and it echoed hollowly in

the well of the stairs with his step on the marble stairway. "Molly!"

"Molly!" It echoed through spacious rooms, softly lighted. "Molly!"

He came to the library and stopped in the doorway, with the wind at his back and the sweat streaking his face. Darkness blotted out the English oak and Rouge Royal marble, the lofty leaded windows. There were only two lights, turned low. They were bronze *torchères* on either side of the portrait over the mantel, and it stood out in the shadows.

"Molly!" It was the beseeching voice of a man, hungering. "Molly!"

She would move—become quick. She would rise from her chair and step down. She would sweep him a curtsy, a fold of her skirt in either hand, while her eyes laughed up at him and she said, "Not—not Rand Bole?" Then she would waltz with him, quick and warm in his arms, to the lilting strains of "The Blue Danube." There was the blue-black hair. There was the blue lace gown with the hooks and eyes. He felt the touch of her fingers smoothing the lines from his forehead.

His gaze dropped to the hand holding the fan in her lap, half hidden in a fold of lace. It held his eyes, and as it held them, the wind at his back gathered force until it was an icy blast roaring down from the hills, and in it was the thin, high howl of roaming wolf packs. He stumbled toward her through the dark. He reached out a shaking hand. He touched canvas. Then his head went down in his arms on the mantel, and the bisque shepherdess looked over his shoulder.

"Molly!" It tore up through his chest in a sob of despairing loss. "Molly!"

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